



## Guide to dental fillings

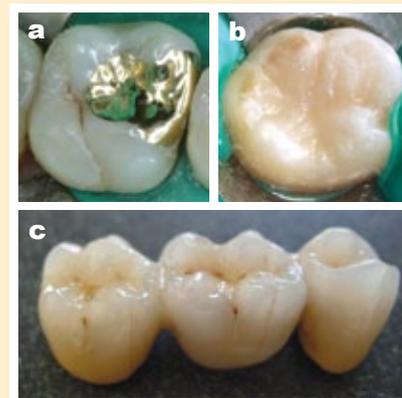
- ◆ What is a filling?
- ◆ What choices of filling materials are there?
- ◆ Tips for preventing the need for fillings

### What is a filling?

A **filling**, or dental **restoration**, is performed by a dentist to restore the structure and function of teeth that have been damaged—for example, by **cavities** because of dental decay (**caries**).

There are two main types of filling:

- **Direct**, made inside the mouth and applied in one visit (eg, amalgam, composite resin, glass ionomer, and resin ionomer fillings)
- **Indirect**, made outside the mouth and usually requiring more than one visit (eg, inlays, onlays, veneers, crowns, and bridges made of gold, ceramics, or composite resins)



### What choices of filling materials are there?

The choice of filling material depends on factors such as site of the filling, durability, biting force, appearance, oral and general health, number of visits, and cost. You should openly discuss with your dentist the advantages and disadvantages of each material, and which type of filling is best for you.

#### Metallic appearance:

- **Amalgam**: mercury + other metals including silver, copper, tin; especially for back teeth\*
- **Gold** (Photo a): gold + copper + other metals

#### Tooth-coloured:

- **Composite resins** (Photo b): acrylic resin + glass-like powder
- **Glass ionomers / glass ionomer cements**: acrylic acids + fine glass powders; especially for root surfaces
- **Resin ionomers / resin ionomer cements**: acrylic acids + acrylic resin + glass filler; especially for non-biting surfaces and primary (milk) teeth
- **Ceramics, porcelains** (Photo c shows a porcelain bridge), or porcelain fused to metal

### Need a filling?

See your dentist immediately if you have any of these:

- ◆ Toothache
- ◆ Teeth that hurt when you bite down, or when eating/drinking something sweet, hot, or cold
- ◆ Sensitive teeth
- ◆ Visible holes, pits, fractures
- ◆ Pus around a tooth

! People with a constant dry mouth, people who have received radiotherapy in the head or neck region, and pregnant women have an increased risk of caries and cavities.

### Tips for preventing the need for fillings

Cavities form when acid produced by mouth bacteria dissolve teeth. You can reduce your risk of tooth decay and the need for fillings by maintaining a healthy diet; avoiding snacks; rinsing after meals and snacks; avoiding hard, sticky, and acidic foods; brushing twice daily with a fluoride toothpaste; and flossing daily. **Visit your dentist regularly**, especially if you have any of the signs in the **Box** above.

\*Amalgam has been in use for more than 150 years, and its use is regularly reviewed; according to the Hong Kong Dental Association, "There is no scientific literature to indicate that the use of dental amalgam is detrimental to health, and replacement of amalgam fillings is not indicated".

Sources: HK Department of Health Tooth Club, <[www.toothclub.gov.hk](http://www.toothclub.gov.hk)>; Hong Kong Dental Association, <[www.hkda.org](http://www.hkda.org)>; American Dental Association, <[www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org)>; Mayo Clinic, <[www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)>; photos: Wikipedia.

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