

1. Why are fillings needed?

Fillings help worn, damaged or decayed teeth last longer. Both adult and baby teeth can be repaired with fillings.

2. Should baby teeth be filled?

Baby teeth are important for speaking, eating and keeping the necessary space for the adult teeth to come through. Some baby teeth stay in your mouth until 13 years of age. A dental professional can give you advice about any baby teeth that should be filled and any baby teeth that could be left to fall out.

3. What happens during a filling?

The tooth may be numbed (by injection), depending on how much damage there is to the tooth or if the patient wants it to be numb. If tooth decay is present, it is removed from the tooth with drills and different instruments. The tooth is cleaned, washed and dried.

The filling material is pushed into the space, restoring the tooth to its original shape. You will be given advice as to which is the best type of filling for your tooth.

You will be asked to bite your teeth together to check your new filling feels comfortable when you chew.

4. What are the risks and complications of this procedure?

- *Sensitivity* to hot or cold for a few weeks after filling.
- *Sensitivity* on biting teeth together for a few days after filling.
- *Allergic reaction* to the filling material. Skin rashes and itching could indicate an allergic reaction.
- *Death* as a result of this procedure is very rare.

5. Will my tooth be numb?

You may or may not have an injection (local anaesthetic) when you have a filling. The injection is to numb your tooth. It is used to prevent or relieve pain, but will not put you to sleep. If the filling is only very small, you may not need to have your tooth numbed.

6. What are the risks and complications of a local anaesthetic during a dental procedure?

- *Damage to lips and cheeks* – you may bite or rub the numbed area without realising the damage you are causing. Children may need to be supervised until the numbness has worn off.
- *Failure of local anaesthetic* – this may require a further injection of anaesthetic or a different method of anaesthesia to be used.
- *Bruising* – if you take any drug used to thin your blood, you are more likely to get a bruise as this

medication may affect the way your body clots your blood. Applying a cold pack to the area will help to minimise the bruising.

- *Nerve damage* – if nerve damage happens, it is usually temporary and will get better over a period of weeks to months. Damage may cause weakness and/or numbness of the mouth, lips, tongue or face that the nerve goes to. Permanent nerve damage rarely happens.
- *Infection at site of injection* – this is uncommon however can be treated with antibiotics.
- *Allergy to the local anaesthetic solution* – is a rare complication and medical attention should be sought immediately.

7. What are white (tooth coloured) fillings?

White (tooth coloured) fillings are made of materials that are able to be stuck to the tooth surface. Some may release fluoride, helping in the reduction of further tooth decay.

8. What are silver fillings?

Silver (amalgam) fillings have been widely used for a long period of time. They are made from a mixture of silver alloy and mercury. Silver (amalgam) fillings are long lasting and durable.

Silver fillings- further information and possible risksⁱ

There is no reliable evidence that people with amalgam fillings have a greater risk of ill health than people without amalgam. A very small number of people may experience local side effects due to an allergic reaction to dental amalgam. The safe use of amalgam as a filling material is confirmed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Dental Federation.

The National Health & Medical Research Centre (NHMRC) suggests avoiding any dental treatment involving silver (amalgam) fillings during pregnancy, unless delaying the treatment could cause greater problems. NHMRC also recommend avoiding the removal or placement of silver (amalgam) fillings during breastfeeding.

Amalgam is now generally avoided for filling children's teeth. Growing children tend to be more sensitive to the effects of exposure to any chemical substance in their environment. Several of the new tooth-coloured materials are suitable for use where cavities are small, as they often are in children.

High level exposure to mercury (which is present in silver fillings) may affect the kidneys. Therefore, the NHMRC, suggest people with kidney disease may be more concerned than others to minimise exposure to mercury.

ⁱ NHMRC *Dental amalgam – filling you in*. October 2002.