

Healthy You

FAST FACTS FOR YOUR HEALTH

Silver Versus White Fillings: A Q&A with Delta Dental of Iowa's Dr. Jeff Chaffin

When it comes to cavity care, there's no one-size-fits-all solution. You and your dentist have options to address tooth decay—the two most common are dental amalgam (better known as silver fillings) and resin composite (or white fillings).

Both silver and white fillings have their benefits and drawbacks. What type lasts longer? Which one costs less? Dr. Jeffrey Chaffin, dental director for Delta Dental of Iowa, answers these and other questions to help you make an informed decision with your dentist.

Q: Can you share basic definitions for dental amalgam and resin composite fillings?

Dr. Jeff Chaffin: Dental amalgam is a silver-looking material that's been used to fill cavities and treat tooth decay for more than 100 years. It contains several types of metal—namely copper, silver, mercury and tin—that's where it gets its silver appearance.

Resin composite fillings contain a mixture of ceramic and plastic to look like natural teeth. That's why your dentist may refer to this type of filling as a white or tooth-colored filling.

Q: What are the benefits and drawbacks of using silver fillings?

Dr. Jeff Chaffin: Dental amalgam has four main benefits:

1. **Long track record:** Dentists have had more than a century to use and understand this type of filling. Patients should feel confident and safe with dental amalgam.
2. **One-step process:** Your dentist needs only one visit to complete a dental amalgam treatment.
3. **Durability:** Dental amalgam keeps a strong seal for at least 10 years, so it doesn't require much follow-up care.
4. **Cost:** Silver fillings are the least expensive type of filling material. It's cost effective, but it's not "cheap"—it's incredibly durable and withstands wear and tear better than other types of filling materials.

Despite these benefits, silver fillings aren't perfect. The three biggest drawbacks are:

1. **Appearance:** Silver fillings don't look like natural teeth. Dental amalgam is often used for fillings in the back of your mouth, but you will notice them when you open your mouth wide.
2. **More drilling:** To create a solid pocket for a silver filling, your dentist may need to remove more of your natural tooth.
3. **Allergy risk:** Though rare, a small number of people have allergies to some of these metals.

Q: What are the benefits and drawbacks of using white fillings?

Dr. Jeff Chaffin: Resin composite fillings have three main benefits:

1. **Appearance:** White fillings match the color of your teeth. That's why white fillings are often used for fillings in the front or visible parts of your mouth.
2. **Easy bonding:** White fillings easily bond to your natural tooth.
3. **Less drilling:** Because resin composite can bond directly to your tooth, dentists don't need to shape your natural teeth using a drill to create a secure filling space.

The three basic drawbacks of using white fillings are:

1. **Frequent follow-ups:** Resin composite fillings may have half the lifespan of silver fillings depending on a person's diet and oral hygiene. That means you may need to replace them more often.
2. **Longer treatment time:** It takes longer for your dentist to place a white filling than a silver filling.
3. **Cost:** White fillings aren't the most expensive type of filling material, but they do cost more than dental amalgam.

A final word: There's no "perfect" filling material, but the pros and cons outlined here will help you identify which best meets your needs. Dental amalgam and resin composite fillings come at different costs, but you can contact the Delta Dental of Iowa customer service number on the back of your insurance card to understand the true costs based on your dental coverage.

Sources

<https://www.colgate.com/en-us/oral-health/procedures/fillings/types-of-fillings>

https://www.deltadentalins.com/oral_health/amalgam.html

Five Healthy Ways to Rut-Bust Your Lunch

Has your lunch break lost its luster? Are you dreading the return of packing school sack lunches?

It's easy to get stuck in a lunch rut, but these five ideas will inspire you to pack more pizzazz into your midday meal. Plus, they all feature nutrients that promote your dental health.

1. Egg and avocado salad sandwich

Adding an avocado to this lunchtime staple adds decadent texture and a major nutritional boost.

Why it's good for your mouth: Egg yolks are one of the few food sources of vitamin D, a nutrient your body needs to absorb the calcium that fortifies your teeth. Adding an avocado not only adds a yummy twist to an old favorite, it also may have major benefits for your mouth. Researchers have linked avocados to oral cancer prevention. Top your sandwich with leafy greens for added calcium and mix in chopped celery, which contains gum-supporting vitamins A and C.

2. Almond coconut bars

Pass on the sugar-laden packaged granola bars in favor of this protein-packed snack.

Why it's good for your mouth: Almonds contain a trifecta of good oral health nutrition: They are low in sugar, high in protein and a good source of calcium. Sticking to snacks that contain lots of protein help ward off cravings for less nutritious options, like candy or processed baked snacks. Topping the bar with some shaved coconut adds a bit of natural sweetness.

3. Ground turkey and veggie lettuce wraps

Burned out on turkey deli sandwiches? Swapping ground turkey for the deli-style variety and lettuce boats for bread gives you a lunch to look forward to.

Why it's good for your mouth: Turkey contains phosphorus, which works with calcium to keep your teeth strong. Mixing in vegetables, such as red peppers and carrots, will add vitamin C for gum health. You can even top with your favorite cheese, which contains calcium and protein for healthy tooth enamel.

4. Sliced apple with almond butter and dark chocolate

This snack-in-a-snap can satisfy the strongest sweet craving, and it has enough protein to power you through your afternoon.

Why it's good for your mouth: Apples are some of the best foods for your oral health. Apples contain a lot of fiber and water, so chewing them causes your mouth to produce saliva that clears away food and bacteria. Eating an apple at the end of your lunch also acts as a toothbrush in a pinch—the apple fibers can lightly scrub your teeth and gums. Topping an apple with protein-rich almond butter adds extra calcium, and a sprinkling of dark chocolate chips delivers antioxidants that prevent bacteria from damaging your teeth.

5. Spinach salad with strawberries and feta

Go ahead, top your salad with cheese—it's one of the best foods for your mouth.

Why it's good for your mouth: Spinach is one of the best things you can eat for total and oral health. It's high in beta-carotene and calcium, which strengthen tooth enamel. Strawberries are loaded with vitamin C for gum health. Adding feta not only adds calcium and protein (and lots of flavor), it may also help prevent tooth decay by increasing the pH levels in your mouth.

Just like the rest of your body, your mouth needs a healthy mix of nutrients to ward off disease and decay. Jazzing up your lunch routine with these five menu ideas will give your mouth a tasty and healthful midday boost.

Sources

<https://www.colgate.com/en-us/oral-health/basics/nutrition-and-oral-health/healthy-foods-list-seven-best-foods-for-your-teeth-0214>