Silver Fillings vs White Fillings Explained | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/difference-silver-fillings-whilte-fillings/

Details:

Silver fillings, also called amalgam fillings, are a traditional restoration material made from a combination of metals including silver, tin, copper and mercury. White fillings, also called composite resin fillings, are made from powdered glass and resin and are designed to match the colour of your natural teeth. Which one suits you depends on appearance, the size and position of the cavity, your budget and your dentist's advice. At Core Dental we explain both options before treatment starts.

What is a tooth filling?

A tooth filling, also called a restoration, is a treatment used to repair a tooth that has been damaged by decay. The dentist removes the decayed part of the tooth and fills the space with a restorative material, which seals the tooth and restores its shape and function. Left untreated, decay can spread deeper towards the nerve of the tooth, so early treatment is usually simpler.

What are silver (amalgam) fillings made of?

Silver fillings are a traditional dental material made from a mixture of metals: silver, tin, copper and mercury. Amalgam has been used in dentistry for many years. If you have questions about the materials used in your mouth, please ask your dentist, who can explain current guidance and your own circumstances, including any history of allergy.

What are the advantages of silver fillings?

Silver fillings are durable and long-lasting, and they are often a lower-cost material than other options. They can suit larger cavities, particularly in back teeth that take a lot of chewing force. They harden quickly, so they are quick to place, and they can suit areas that are difficult for the dentist to keep dry during treatment.

What are the disadvantages of silver fillings?

The main disadvantage is appearance. Silver fillings are noticeable because of their colour, which matters most near the front of the mouth where they are highly visible. They are also less conservative: more healthy tooth structure often needs to be removed to place and hold the filling in position.

What are white (composite) fillings made of?

White fillings are made of powdered glass and acrylic resin, and they are designed to match the colour of natural teeth. They bond to the tooth, which often allows the dentist to keep more of your natural tooth structure. They are commonly chosen for front teeth and for people who care about appearance. In some situations, such as very large cavities or areas that cannot be kept dry, your dentist may

suggest a different material.

How do you choose between a silver and a white filling?

The choice depends on a number of factors: appearance, the extent and location of the cavity, your finances and the recommendation of your dentist. Ask your dentist what each option involves, how long it may be expected to last in your situation, and what it costs. We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans, so you know what to expect. Fees and finance terms can change, so confirm current written terms before you proceed.

How can we help?

If you suspect you may need a filling and would like to talk to a dentist, contact the team at your local Core Dental clinic. You can also read about what happens when you get a dental filling or how to tell whether you need a filling . Call 13 13 16 or book online.

The mercury question, answered by the state health department

This is the question underneath most searches for the difference between silver and white fillings, so it deserves a direct answer from a named source rather than reassurance from us.

The Victorian Department of Health gives its section a heading that is itself the answer: "Amalgam ('silver') fillings are safe". The reasoning follows in two sentences:

"Some people have concerns about dental amalgam fillings because they contain mercury."

"High amounts of mercury are harmful to human health, but the amount of 'free' mercury (mercury that could get into the body) in set amalgam fillings is so low that it has no effect on health."

Three things in that are worth drawing out, because the sentence is more precise than it first appears.

It concedes the premise. Amalgam does contain mercury, and high amounts of mercury are harmful. The Department does not dispute either point. What it disputes is the inference.

The distinction it draws is "free" mercury. Not mercury present in the material, but mercury that could actually get into the body. The published position is about availability, not ingredients — which is why "it contains mercury" and "it exposes you to mercury" are not the same claim.

The word "set" is doing work. The statement is about mercury in a hardened filling in your mouth. It is not a statement about handling the raw material, which is a workplace question rather than a patient one.

This page is produced by the Department of Health, in consultation with and approved by Oral Health Victoria, and its own stated review date is 1 August 2025. We are attributing it to the Department because that is who publishes it. You may encounter the same conclusion attributed to various dental associations; we have not read those statements, so we are not citing them.

What this does not settle. The Department's filling page says nothing whatsoever about allergy or hypersensitivity to amalgam or to any other filling material — no symptoms, no diagnostic test, no indication of how common it is. "Safe for the population" and "safe for you specifically" are different questions, and the published advice only answers the first. If you believe you have reacted to a filling, that is a matter for examination, and anyone quoting you a prevalence figure is going beyond the state health advice.

Nor does the Department recommend removing existing amalgam fillings. There is no such recommendation on the page in either direction. Removing a sound filling means removing some healthy tooth with it, which is a trade-off worth discussing with the person who can see the tooth.

Source: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental fillings, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (page reviewed 1 August 2025; accessed 4 November 2026).

Why the published advice refuses to rank the two — and why there are more than two

The framing of "silver versus white" has a hidden assumption: that these are the two options and one of them is better. The published list supports neither half of that.

The Victorian Department of Health's full list of filling materials:

"composite resin (also known as 'tooth-coloured' fillings)"

"glass-ionomer cement"

"dental amalgam (also known as 'silver' fillings, rarely used)"

"gold (rarely used due to cost)"

"porcelain."

So the choice is not binary. Glass-ionomer cement and porcelain are both on the published list and rarely feature in the popular comparison at all. And the Department's own parenthetical describes amalgam as "rarely used" — a usage observation, published on the same page that states amalgam is safe. Those two statements are not in tension: something can be safe and uncommon at once, and conflating "rarely used" with "withdrawn" or "no longer considered safe" misreads the source.

On ranking, the Department's position is explicit: "Each different material has benefits and limitations. Some types of material may be better than others in certain situations. Your oral health professional can discuss your options with you."

"In certain situations" is the whole answer. Not a winner, a dependency. Its companion guidance names what the situation consists of: "you will be given advice on the most suitable material based on the size, shape and location of the filling". A small cavity in a front tooth and a large one in a back molar are different situations, and no general ranking survives contact with that.

What the published advice does say about tooth-coloured material is narrower than a recommendation. The wording is that "a common choice is tooth-coloured filling material (such as composite resin or ceramic), which can restore the appearance of the tooth, as well as its shape and function". Read it carefully: it describes a common choice and lists what the material can restore — appearance, shape, function. It is not a statement that composite outperforms amalgam.

The one durability note the published advice offers goes the other way from most marketing. On composite resin used to restore teeth, the Department's wording is: "This resin may need to be replaced in future if it chips, wears or stains." That is a limitation of the tooth-coloured option, stated by the Department, and it is the kind of detail that gets left out of a two-column comparison.

So what should you actually ask? Not "which is better", but: what are the size, shape and position of my cavity, which materials are suitable for it, and what are the limitations of the one you are recommending. The Department's instruction is to have that conversation — "your oral health professional can discuss your options with you" — and that is a conversation we would rather have in front of your tooth than in a comparison table.

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental fillings, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 1 August 2025); Dental treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 3 June 2026). Both accessed 4 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Are silver fillings still used?

Amalgam is still used in some situations, for example in larger back-tooth cavities or areas that are hard to keep dry. Your dentist will recommend the material that suits your tooth after an examination, and you are welcome to ask about the alternatives.

Do white fillings match my teeth?

White fillings are made in shades chosen to match your natural teeth, so they usually blend in well. Your dentist will select a shade at your appointment. Colour can change slightly over time, for example with staining from food and drinks.

Which filling lasts longer?

How long a filling lasts depends on the material, the size and position of the filling, your bite, your cleaning habits and regular check-ups. Your dentist can explain what to expect for your tooth, as no material lasts forever.

Will my filling be sensitive afterwards?

Some people notice mild sensitivity to hot, cold or biting after a filling, which often settles in time. If it lasts or gets worse, contact us so a dentist can check your tooth and your bite.

Can I replace an old silver filling with a white one?

Sometimes. Your dentist can assess the filling and the tooth, and explain the reasons for and against replacing it, as removing a sound filling can mean losing some healthy tooth. The decision is made together after an examination.

Does a set amalgam filling release mercury into my body?

Not at a level the published advice treats as a health concern. The Victorian Department of Health's statement is that "the amount of 'free' mercury (mercury that could get into the body) in set amalgam fillings is so low that it has no effect on health". It accepts that amalgam contains mercury and that high amounts of mercury are harmful — the distinction it draws is how much can actually get into the body from a set filling.

Should I have my amalgam fillings taken out?

The published state health advice makes no such recommendation, in either direction. It is worth weighing that removing a sound filling also removes some healthy tooth, which is a decision for an examination rather than a general rule.

Is "rarely used" the same as "no longer recommended"?

No. "Rarely used" is the Department's own parenthetical beside dental amalgam on its list of filling materials, and it appears on the same page that states amalgam fillings are safe. It describes how often the material is chosen, not a safety verdict. The Department applies the same phrase to gold, with the reason given as cost.

Are silver and white the only two choices?

No — the published list has five entries: composite resin, glass-ionomer cement, dental amalgam, gold and porcelain. The popular comparison leaves out glass-ionomer cement and porcelain entirely, so framing the decision as two options narrows it before the examination has happened.

Does the published advice say white fillings have no drawbacks?

No, and it names one. On tooth-coloured composite used to restore teeth, the Department's wording is that "this resin may need to be replaced in future if it chips, wears or stains". Its general position covers both materials: "each different material has benefits and limitations".

Related services and further reading

Fillings and restorations

Fillings and restorations FAQs

How do I know if I need a filling?

What happens when you get a dental filling

Allergic reaction to an amalgam filling

Difference between a crown and a porcelain filling

Tooth sensitivity after a filling

General dentistry

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

Interest-free payment plans and HICAPS on-site claiming.

Call 13 13 16 or book online.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online at coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 8.00am to 1.30pm (Bayside Saturday 8.30am to 1.30pm), Sunday closed
Clinics	Southbank , South Melbourne , Caroline Springs , Carrum Downs , Epping , Wyndham , Berwick , Bayside , Glenferrie

This article is general in nature and does not replace advice from a registered dental practitioner who has examined you. Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before

proceeding.

What are silver fillings made of?

Silver, or amalgam, fillings are made from a combination of metals including silver, tin, copper and mercury. Core Dental dentists can explain how the material is used and answer questions about your own circumstances.

What are white fillings made of?

White fillings, called composite resin fillings, are made from powdered glass and resin and are shaded to match natural teeth. Core Dental dentists often use them where appearance matters, such as front teeth.

What is a restoration in dentistry?

A restoration is another word for a filling. At Core Dental it means repairing a tooth damaged by decay by removing the decayed part and sealing the space with a suitable material.

Why might a dentist suggest a silver filling?

Silver fillings are durable, quick to place and can suit large back-tooth cavities or areas that are hard to keep dry. Core Dental dentists consider these points along with appearance and cost.

What is the main drawback of white fillings for large cavities?

In very large cavities or areas that are hard to keep dry, a composite filling may not always suit. Core Dental dentists examine the tooth first and explain which material is suitable.

What do Core Dental dentists consider when choosing a filling?

Our dentists consider appearance, the size and position of the cavity, your budget and their clinical recommendation. We quote before treatment starts so you can decide with the full picture.

Does Core Dental offer payment plans for fillings?

Core Dental offers interest-free payment plans, and HICAPS claiming is available on site. Plan terms and eligibility apply, so please confirm current written terms with our team when you book.

How do I book a filling appointment at Core Dental?

Call 13 13 16 or book online at coredental.com.au. Tell our team about your symptoms and we will arrange an examination at one of our nine Melbourne clinics.