

Q & A Tooth Colored Fillings

Dentistry, as with any other profession, has its disagreements. Some doctors place silver-mercury fillings, while others do not. According to the American Dental Association, it's a matter of choice, not safety. Dentistry is an art and a science that we all practice to varying degrees. Personally, I'm under the impression that we should agree to disagree and all practice how we see fit for our patients. All I want is for all of my people to avoid toothaches, have confident smiles, and eat what they enjoy. That's not really too much to ask from your dentist.

In our office, the only fillings we do are tooth colored. The last mercury-silver filling I placed was for my state board exam and I plan to keep it that way. Without getting into the pros and cons of silver fillings, let's just say that I do not have any in my own mouth. They are a valid treatment, but I choose not to place them. Here are some of the more common questions we get about tooth colored restorations.

When can I eat? - One of the great advantages of tooth colored fillings is that they are "cured" with a blue light and can be used right away. As soon as your numbness wears off, go try them out on your favorite meal.

Will my insurance pay for tooth colored fillings versus traditional silver-mercury fillings? - The answer is maybe or sometimes. Tooth colored fillings are more complicated and, therefore, more expensive than mercury containing fillings. A few years back, it seemed that insurance would only pay the fee for silver fillings, but this seems to get better each year. Every plan is different so please consult your insurance company before you take my word.

Why do I have five cavities all of a sudden? I thought adults didn't get cavities? - One of the really great advantages of tooth colored fillings is that they can be extremely conservative. In other words, a small cavity today can be filled rather than a more expensive root canal and crown later on down the line. Root canal treatment is much improved, but I'd still rather just get a routine filling.

How long do tooth colored fillings last? - This is the million dollar question. My honest answer is that I really do not know. Anything in your mouth will last as long as you take good care of it. Whether the material is gold, silver-mercury, ceramic, or plastic resin, the restorations in your mouth will last as long as you maintain them. I've seen some amazing work fail and I've seen less than perfect work last for years. The most common thread I've witnessed has been how well we take care of our mouths. The best fillings in the world cannot stand up to a six pack of soda every day. No matter how famous, skilled, or educated your dentist may be.

Will my fillings stain? - The short answer is yes, the more food and drink you consume, the more likely they will turn color where the filling material and tooth meet. Coffee, tea, grape juice, and red wine are some major culprits. Avoid colored foods and avoid stained teeth, this includes your natural teeth, not just fillings.

Hopefully, this has cleared up a little. Until next time, keep smiling.