



How do you determine if a cavity is present?

- **Examination.** Some discolored spots on your teeth may indicate decay, but not all of them. Your dentist will use an explorer, a metal instrument with a sharp tip, for a more thorough examination of possible decay.
- **Cavity-detecting dye.** This can be rinsed over your tooth. It will stick to decayed areas and rinse cleanly from healthy ones.
- **X-rays.** X-rays can help see decay that doesn't show on the surface.

You may require fillings for other reasons than decay. Cracked, worn, or broken teeth may also need fillings.

How often should I have my teeth X-rayed?

Many people require regular x-rays to monitor their oral health. Exactly how often this happens will depend on your medical and dental history and current oral/dental condition. Some people may need x-rays as often as every six months. People who visit the dentist regularly and have excellent oral health may need x-rays much less frequently.



We recommend that patients have a panoramic x-ray also. The advantage of this x-ray is that it shows the entire jaws and all of the teeth. This x-ray isn't taken very often, but it is important to occasionally check all the areas of the jaws for problems that couldn't readily be seen in the x-rays that are placed inside your mouth.

Who needs more frequent or regular radiographs?

- **Children and adolescents.** Children and adolescents at high risk of decay may need x-rays taken once every six months or once a year, depending on age. X-rays also help monitor tooth development. In addition, because the enamel is thinner in primary teeth and the nerve is closer to the outside of the tooth, cavities start more quickly and nerve problems arise much sooner.
- **Adults with extensive restoration work,** including fillings and crowns. X-rays help find decay beneath existing fillings and crowns or in new locations.
- **People with periodontal (gum) disease.**
- **People with dry mouth.** Saliva helps dilute the acids that cause cavities. People that have decrease saliva function have higher rates of decay.
- **Smokers.** Smoking increases your risk of periodontal disease.

What are the main kinds of fillings?

There are several types of fillings, but the most common are silver amalgam and bonded composite fillings. Some people experience sensitivity after they receive a filling. The tooth may be sensitive to pressure, air, sweet foods or temperature. Composite fillings often cause sensitivity, but other types of filling material can, too. In most cases, the sensitivity will subside over one to two weeks.



Composite filling by Dr. Taylor

How long do fillings last?

Fillings don't last forever. They can become discolored or cracked or just wear out due to the tremendous pressure chewing causes on your teeth. It is very important that your fillings are checked regularly so they may be replaced before large problems occur.

How can I help maintain my fillings?

To help your fillings last, you should visit us regularly for cleanings, brush with a fluoride toothpaste, and floss at least once a day. For people with many fillings or very large fillings, you may benefit from a fluoride gel you can use at home. The fluoride will help strengthen your teeth and prevent future cavities.

