

Alternatives for Restoration Treatments

Types for restorations

When your teeth need restoration, we can choose from several different types, including:

- Fillings
- Crowns
- Inlays
- Onlays

All restorations seal out bacteria and restore the shape of the tooth, so the type we recommend depends on how strong the tooth is and how much tooth structure has been lost.

Delaying treatment

If you are thinking of delaying treatment, you should know that tooth decay will never go away on its own. It grows slowly while it's still in the hard enamel, but if decay is allowed to reach the softer inner dentin, it grows much more quickly, allowing bacteria to infect the pulp chamber. If this happens, you'll need root canal therapy to save the tooth. That's why we recommend treating the tooth as soon as possible.



Decay growing in a tooth



Fillings restore small areas



Crowns cover and protect

Fillings

Both amalgam and composite resin fillings usually can be placed directly into the tooth in a single appointment. They work well to restore the tooth when only a small amount of tooth structure has been lost. But when a tooth has suffered more extensive damage, there may not be enough structure remaining to hold a filling in place without risk of breaking the tooth.

Crowns

On the other end of the scale from a filling is a crown. Crowns completely cover the top and sides of a tooth, protecting it and restoring its shape and function. We may choose a crown when a lot of tooth structure has been lost. We may also recommend a crown when the tooth is weak, has had root canal therapy, is under a lot of stress from heavy biting forces, or is cracked or broken off at the gumline. Crowns are custom crafted outside of your mouth to precisely fit your tooth, and then they are placed in a separate step. They may take two or more appointments to complete.

Inlays and onlays

When a tooth needs more than a filling but less than a crown, we may recommend an inlay or onlay. Both of these restorations may take two or more appointments. An inlay fills in the area lost to tooth decay, usually in the grooves between the cusps of the biting surface of the tooth. We might choose an inlay over a filling when we need to use a stronger material or when a more durable restoration is needed.

An onlay is more like a crown because it covers both the grooves and one or more of the cusps. We might choose an onlay over a crown when the biting surface of the tooth needs to be restored, but much of the tooth structure is still strong and healthy.