

# Understanding Dental Crowns



One of the reasons your dentist likes to take care of cavities promptly is because getting a cavity is often the first step toward eventually needing to get a crown.

Fillings don't last forever. You may have experienced times when your dentist told you that a filling needed to be mended or replaced. What you may not have realized is that over time, fillings can only get bigger. At some point the filling takes up so much of the tooth that the tooth is no longer structurally strong enough, and you are at risk for the tooth actually cracking from the daily work you ask it to do anytime you eat something. As you can imagine, this can be a painful experience. By having your dentist deal promptly with cavities while they are still small, you are also postponing the day when you will need to have a conversation about getting a crown instead of just replacing a filling.

Unless you have teeth that are in perfect condition your entire life, it is probable that someday you will need to get a crown. Of course, there are also other reasons why you might need a crown. If your tooth does crack, or if your tooth has gotten worn down, a crown can effectively be used to salvage what is left and make it stronger. Crowns are also used as part of the bridge structure, if you need a dental bridge because you've lost one or more teeth, to cover implants, and to make teeth that are badly shaped or discolored look more normal. Your dentist can give you a temporary or a permanent crown; temporary crowns are generally made of either stainless steel or acrylic. Your dentist can make them in the office. Permanent crowns are generally made in a lab.



Permanent crowns can be made from different materials:



METAL CROWN

► You've probably noticed people who have metal crowns. Dentists have used gold alloy, other alloys such as palladium, or alloys that involve a base metal, such as chromium or nickel. This kind of crown is noticeable, of course, but it does have some notable advantages. A metal crown lasts longer than anything else, and it is extremely strong and durable. It isn't likely to break, or to damage the teeth it comes into contact with, and your dentist won't have to remove as much of the original tooth in order to install one. And if it installed over a molar at the back of your mouth, the metal crown won't be as easy to notice. Metal crowns certainly have their place.



PORCELAIN/METAL

► You might want to consider a crown where porcelain has been fused to the metal. It looks more like a natural tooth, but it does have some disadvantages. It is harder on the teeth it comes into contact with, the porcelain can chip, break off, and it can show the underlying metal as a dark line at the gum. However, if you need a crown at the front of your mouth, it might be a good choice. Even if the crown is over a molar, you might prefer the more natural look of this kind of crown.



RESIN

► The least expensive kind of crown is made entirely of resin. They do show wear over time, and can even fracture, but look more natural than metal.



CERAMIC

► Some crowns are entirely made of either ceramic or porcelain. (A porcelain crown is a kind of ceramic crown, but it has been stacked and fired during the construction process.) All-ceramic or all-porcelain crowns look more natural than any other kind of crown because they share the same kind of natural translucency as your original teeth. However, they do require a higher degree of experience and skill than other kinds of crowns in order to be placed correctly over the tooth and to get the color right so it matches the other teeth. The dentist who installs them needs to have the eye and the skill of an artist in order to get it right, but when one is done well, it really does look just like the original tooth. Different kinds are available; your dentist can go over the different possibilities with you and discuss the advantages or disadvantages of each. It won't be as strong a tooth as metal or porcelain fused to metal, and it may be necessary for your dentist to remove more of the original tooth than would

be necessary for other kinds of crowns, because there can be an inner ceramic core covered by an outer porcelain layer, but the natural-looking results may be worth it. Also, some ceramic or porcelain crowns are easier on the surrounding teeth than others; for example, an Empress crown, which is a glass-like ceramic, is less abrasive against other teeth while still giving a beautiful appearance. The most beautiful porcelain crown is considered to be the Feldspathic porcelain, but some dentists do prefer an Empress crown to a Feldspathic porcelain crown, and both can be extremely attractive when done correctly.

If you are interested in the benefits of getting a crown, start by talking with our office so we can determine whether a crown would work for you.

