



Dentist

Dr Lincoln Tentena

What should I expect after a dental filling?

A dental filling is one of the most common treatments for tooth decay, and for most people, it is a quick and effective way to stop the problem from getting worse. After the procedure, it is normal to notice a few temporary changes in the treated tooth and the surrounding area. These effects usually settle with time, but understanding what is normal can help you feel more comfortable during recovery.

Numbness and early mouth sensations

If your dentist used a local anaesthetic, the first thing you will notice is numbness. This can affect the treated tooth, as well as the lips, cheek, and sometimes the tongue on the same side of the mouth. The numb feeling usually wears off within two to four hours, although in some people it may last a little longer, depending on the type and amount of anaesthetic used.

While the mouth is still numb, it is important to be careful when eating or drinking. You may accidentally bite your lip, cheek, or tongue without realising it, so it is best to avoid chewing until normal feeling returns. This is especially important for children, who may not notice injuries while still numb. Cool drinks are usually safe, but very hot foods and beverages should be avoided until sensation fully comes back.

Sensitivity and healing after the filling

It is also common for the filled tooth to feel sensitive for a short period after treatment. You may notice discomfort when eating or drinking something cold, hot, or sweet, or when biting down on the tooth.

This sensitivity can start immediately or develop within a few days after the procedure.

For most people, the discomfort gradually improves within one to two weeks. If the cavity was deep or close to the nerve of the tooth, it may take up to four to six weeks for the tooth to fully settle. During this time, chewing on the opposite side of the mouth can help reduce discomfort, and using a toothpaste designed for sensitive teeth may also provide relief.

A mild soreness around the tooth or gum is also normal for the first day or two. The tooth may feel slightly different when biting, especially if the mouth was open for a long time during treatment. This usually improves as the area heals.

Note

However, it is important to return to your dentist if the numbness lasts much longer than expected, especially beyond six hours, or if the pain becomes severe, worsens, or disturbs your sleep. You should also seek review if the tooth hurts when biting or feels too high when you close your teeth together, or if sensitivity to hot and cold does not improve after a few weeks.

Any swelling, bad taste, pus, fever, or a filling that feels loose, cracked, or has fallen out should also be checked immediately.

Most dental fillings heal smoothly, and any discomfort is temporary. If something does not feel right, it is always better to have it checked early, as a small adjustment or review can quickly resolve the problem and prevent further complications.