Named for the mythological character Tantalus by Anders Ekenberg who discovered it in 1802, tantalum is a heavy, gray metal that resembles the more expensive platinum in many respects and is sometimes used as an economical substitute for that element. The metal comprises only 0.0002% of the earth's crust and most deposits lie outside the U.S. which is the chief consumer.

Tantalum alloys are corrosion and wear resistant and find use in dental and surgical tools. Tantalum oxide is used in some electronic components and a composite of tantalum carbide (TaC) and graphite is one of the hardest materials ever produced.

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