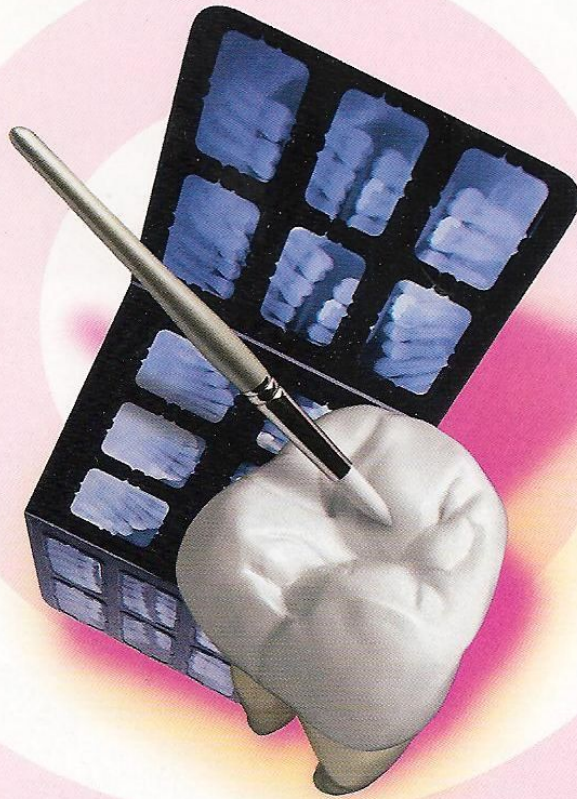




TARGETING HEALTHY SMILES

sealants

help prevent
tooth decay



ADA[®]

protecting your healthy smile

A bright, healthy smile can help you feel and look good throughout your life. The first step in maintaining a healthy mouth is preventing tooth decay, and sealants can offer major protection against cavities.



What causes tooth decay?

Your teeth are covered with a sticky film of bacteria, called plaque. Plaque bacteria use sugar and starch in food as a source of energy. The bacteria convert the sugar or starch into harmful acids that attack tooth enamel for as long as 20 minutes or more. Repeated attacks may cause the enamel to break down, resulting in cavities.

Why aren't sealants used on all teeth?

Thorough brushing and flossing help remove food particles and plaque from smooth surfaces of teeth. Pits and fissures, however, are places that are extremely difficult to clean. Toothbrush bristles cannot reach all the way into the depressions and grooves to extract food and plaque. The normal flow of saliva, which helps clean food particles from other areas of the mouth, cannot "wash out" pits and fissures. So they are places that are especially prone to decay. In fact, most cavities form in pit and fissure areas, and permanent molars are extremely susceptible to this form of decay. Sealants protect these vulnerable areas by "sealing out" plaque and food.

Sealants are just for kids, right?

The likelihood of developing pit and fissure decay begins early in life, so children and teenagers are obvious candidates. But adults can benefit from sealants as well.

Do sealants have any other benefits in addition to preventing decay?

Sealants can also stop small areas of decay from becoming larger. Reliable clinical studies have confirmed that properly placed sealants, if kept intact, will stop decay in the enamel.

Is sealant application a complicated procedure?

Sealants are easy for your dentist to apply, and it takes only a few minutes to seal each tooth. The teeth that will be sealed are cleaned. Then the chewing surfaces are conditioned to help the sealant adhere to the tooth. The sealant is then 'painted' onto the tooth enamel, where it bonds directly to the tooth and hardens. Sometimes a special curing light is used to help the sealant harden.

How long do sealants last?

As long as the sealant remains intact, the tooth surface will be protected from decay. Sealants hold up well under the force of normal chewing and usually last several years before a reapplication is needed. During your regular dental visits, your dentist will check the condition of the sealants and reapply them when necessary.



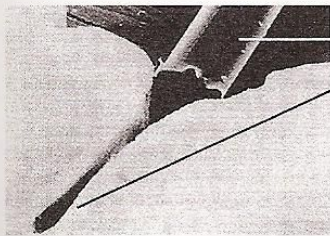
top: Chewing surface of a molar before sealant is applied.



bottom: Chewing surface of a molar protected by a shaded sealant.

What factors could make an adult a candidate for sealants?

The best way to determine the need for sealants is to evaluate the person's risk for pit and fissure decay, which continues throughout adulthood and varies from one person to another. Risk can also vary for the same person over time, because changes in personal habits, health status and medication use are known to increase risk for decay.



toothbrush bristle

fissure

Even a single toothbrush bristle is too large to reach inside the fissure (magnified).

Lack of access to fluorides and fluoridated water, a history of previous decay, and chronic xerostomia (dry mouth) are also factors your dentist will consider when evaluating you for sealants.

Do sealants help save money?

Prevention is better than treatment. When one considers that properly applied and maintained sealants are extremely effective in preventing pit and fissure decay, sealants are a very cost-effective measure. Savings in both dollars and discomfort can be gained by application of sealants, rather than allowing decay and requiring the tooth to be restored. For over 20 years the American Dental Association has evaluated sealants, and a number of different brands have been awarded the ADA Seal of Acceptance, a symbol of a product's safety and effectiveness. In addition, many private dental plans cover sealants. If your plan does not, contact your employer's benefits manager to suggest that sealants be included in future dental plans.

Key ingredients in preventing tooth decay and maintaining a healthy mouth are twice-daily brushing with a fluoride toothpaste; cleaning between the teeth daily with floss or interdental cleaners; eating a balanced diet and limiting snacks; and visiting your dentist regularly. When shopping for toothbrushes, toothpaste and other oral care products, choose those that bear the ADA Seal of Acceptance — an important symbol of a dental product's safety and effectiveness.

Ask your dentist about whether sealants can put extra power behind your prevention program.



How does a sealant help
prevent decay?

A sealant is a plastic material
that is usually applied
to the chewing surfaces
of the back teeth —
premolars and molars.

This plastic resin
bonds into the depressions
and grooves (pits and fissures)
of the chewing surfaces
of back teeth.

The sealant acts as a barrier,
protecting enamel from
plaque and acids.

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