

Talking with Patients

Sealants

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WHAT IS IT?

Sealants are protective resin coatings that are applied in pits and grooves of teeth to prevent tooth decay. Sealants mechanically block pits and grooves, not allowing dental plaque to accumulate and cause caries. Brushing and flossing help prevent tooth decay on smooth surfaces of teeth, but frequently brushing cannot reach into the small pits and grooves to completely clean them. Therefore, these areas are prone to tooth decay. The surfaces most often sealed are the chewing surfaces of back teeth (molars and premolars), but sealants also can be applied to grooves and depressions on other teeth.

Sealants are typically placed right after tooth eruption to be more effective. Sealants do not require any significant tooth preparation or

drilling. The area or areas to be treated are simply cleaned of debris, etched with an acid conditioner, and sealed with a thin layer of the sealant material. The sealant is then hardened with a curing light. Properly placed sealants do not interfere with the bite.

WHEN IS IT NEEDED?

Patients at high risk for dental decay benefit most from dental sealants. Because the caries risk is

ADVANTAGES

- prevention of dental decay
- less expensive than filling
- do not require drilling

DISADVANTAGES

- might leak or be lost if not properly applied
- might be “overtreatment” if risk for caries is low

not easily determined, many clinicians recommend sealants for every recently erupted permanent back tooth. Therefore, children and teenagers are usually good candidates for sealant. Your dentist can determine your caries risk and whether sealant application is appropriate.

CONCLUSIONS

Sealants represent an effective tool for the prevention of dental caries in pits, fissures, and grooves of teeth. When properly applied, sealants provide protection for a long time.

The following photographs illustrate the application of sealant in an area susceptible to dental caries. Note in Figure 2 the resin sealant coating the pit and groove area observed in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Before sealant.



Figure 2. After sealant.