

Dental Sealants

What are dental sealants?

Dental sealants are thin plastic coatings that are applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth to prevent decay. Most tooth decay in children and teenagers occurs on the chewing surfaces where pits and grooves tend to trap food and bacteria. Sealants fill in these pits and grooves so that bacteria cannot multiply and cause decay.

How are sealants applied?

Applying sealants is quite simple and may be done by a dental hygienist or dentist. First, the teeth are cleaned. Then the teeth to be sealed are dabbed with a very mild acid solution similar in strength to vinegar or lemon juice.

This roughens the tooth surface slightly so that the sealant will bond to it. After the tooth is prepared, the sealant is painted onto the tooth. It flows into the pits and grooves and hardens in about 60 seconds. After sealing, bacteria cannot reach the pits and grooves and cause decay. Applying sealants requires no drilling or removal of the tooth surface.

Will sealants make teeth feel different?

Sealants will not result in any change in bite because they are very thin and only fill the pits and grooves. At first they may feel somewhat bulky, but a few days of normal chewing will wear the sealants into place.

How long will dental sealants last?

A sealant application can last as long as five years and often longer. Sealants should be checked regularly and reapplied if they wear off. Because teeth are more likely to decay when they first appear in the mouth, dental sealants are recommended for children and teenagers.

Why is sealing a tooth better than waiting for decay and filling a cavity?

Sealants help to keep teeth healthy by protecting them from decay. Decay destroys parts of the tooth. Each time a tooth is filled or a filling is replaced, more tooth is lost. Silver fillings last about six to eight years before they need to be replaced. Using sealants saves time and money and helps to keep teeth healthy.

For more information, contact

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NOTE: This fact sheet was derived from one previously published by the Arizona Department of Health Services.