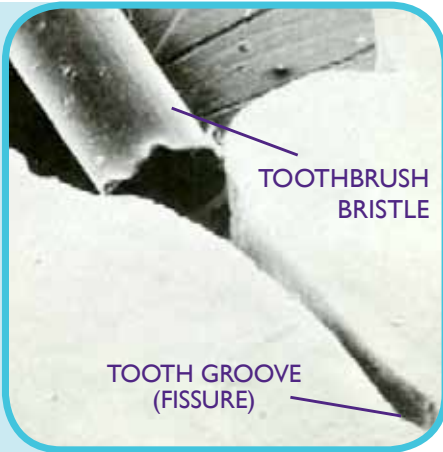


DENTAL SEALANTS

PROTECTING TEETH - PREVENTING DECAY



Our teeth are constantly being covered with a sticky film of bacteria, called plaque. When we eat or drink anything that contains sugar—such as cookies, candy, soda, juice, fruit and many other foods and beverages—bacteria turn the sugar into acids that can attack tooth enamel. For some people, repeated attacks may eventually result in decay. The good news is that there is a way to protect your teeth and prevent decay.

One of the most common places that tooth decay develops is on the chewing surfaces of the back teeth, the bicuspid and molars. When you run your tongue along the chewing surfaces of the back teeth, you can feel depressions and grooves. These indentations, called pits and fissures, help to grind food.

Regular brushing and cleaning between teeth with floss or another interdental cleaner, helps remove food particles and bacteria from the smooth surfaces of your teeth. However, it's difficult to keep the pits and fissures clean. That's because toothbrush bristles can't reach into the grooves of your back teeth to remove plaque, bacteria and tiny particles of food.

WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

Because the grooves on the back of your teeth are hard to keep clean, your dentist may recommend dental sealants. A dental sealant is a plastic material that is applied to the chewing surface of a back tooth. The sealant acts as a barrier, protecting enamel by “sealing out” plaque and food from the pits and fissures.

HOW ARE SEALANTS APPLIED?

Sealants are easy to apply, and it takes only a few minutes to seal each tooth. First, the teeth that will be sealed are cleaned and prepared to accept the sealant. The sealant is then “painted” on the tooth enamel where it bonds directly to the tooth and hardens. Sealants are generally clear or white and cannot be seen when you talk or smile. The picture to the right shows a molar before and after a dental sealant is applied.



HOW LONG DO SEALANTS LAST?

As long as the sealant remains intact, the tooth's chewing surfaces will be protected from plaque and food. Sealants, which hold up well under the force of everyday chewing, can last a few years before a reapplication is needed. Much like tires on your car, sealants can wear down. It is important to see your dentist regularly to check that the sealant remains intact.

The likelihood of developing tooth decay on the chewing surfaces begins shortly after teeth come into the mouth, so children and teenagers are obvious candidates for sealants. Adults can benefit from sealants as well because you never “outgrow” the risk for developing cavities.

KEEPING YOUR SMILE HEALTHY

Dental sealants can help prevent decay. They can also help save time and money that would have been spent on restorative dental procedures such as fillings or crowns. In order to keep your smile healthy, brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. You should clean between your teeth with floss daily to help prevent cavities from forming between the teeth. Also, visit your dentist regularly and avoid between-meal snacks.



BEFORE



AFTER

* Information obtained from the American Dental Association.

