

Fact Sheet

Academy of General Dentistry

Dental Sealants

What is a sealant?

Sealants are a thin plastic coating that is painted on the tooth surface to fill the grooves and pits. The coating is hardened to protect the tooth surface from decay. The coating can be clear, white or slightly tinted, but is virtually impossible to see because of its placement on the back molars. Sealants are a great option for the prevention of dental caries because they act as a physical barrier to decay. The protection is determined by the sealants' ability to adhere to the tooth.

What is the process for sealants?

The dentist cleans and rinses the tooth surface to make sure that it is free of any decay. Then a special cleansing liquid is rubbed on the tooth and washed away. Finally, a seal is applied, usually on the chewing surface of the back teeth until it hardens. The procedure is pain-free and takes about five minutes per tooth.

Who is a good candidate for sealants?

Anyone who is at a high risk for dental caries should consider sealants. In general, children are good candidates for sealants as long as they are applied before their teeth have a chance to decay.

It may be beneficial to apply sealants to newly erupted molars (six and

twelve year). You should talk with your general dentist about sealants if you have a disability or do not use fluoridated water. Adults also can benefit from this procedure because they have the same grooves and pits. Ask your dentist if you are a good candidate for sealants.

Why should I ask about sealants?

The chewing surfaces of children's teeth are susceptible to decay because children have a harder time cleaning the tiny grooves and pits on certain teeth, and fluoride is not necessarily as effective on the teeth in this area. So although your child may brush and floss carefully, food and bacteria still can build up in the depressions, leaving a higher risk for decay.

Other patients also can benefit from sealant placement, such as those who have existing grooves and pits that are susceptible to decay.

Are sealants better than "filling a cavity"?

Yes, approximately three-quarters of sealed teeth remain cavity free, compared to less than one-third of teeth without sealants. Plus research has shown that almost everyone has a 95 percent chance of eventually experiencing cavities in the grooves and pits of the teeth. Sealants can save time,

money and discomfort from more invasive procedures and help maintain intact teeth by preventing decay, which destroys tooth structure.

Some research has shown that sealants may stop cavities when placed on top of a slightly decayed tooth by sealing off the supply of nutrients to the bacteria, which is the cause of caries.

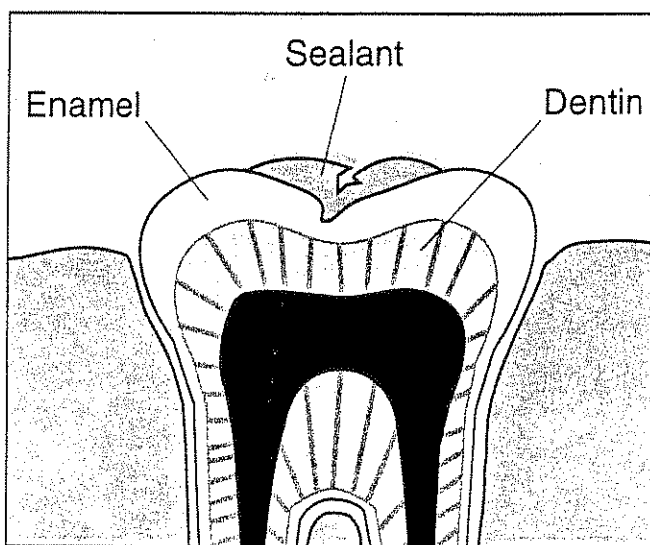
How long do dental sealants last?

Dental sealants have a very high success rate and can last up to 10 years. To receive the maximum benefit from sealants, children should continue practicing good oral hygiene, which includes

brushing and flossing daily. Diet also can be a factor in the effectiveness of sealants. Avoid biting hard objects, such as hard candies.

Sealants are just one part of a child's preventive dentistry program which should include fluoride, plaque removal and regular dental care. Loose or defective sealants can be replaced at follow-up appointments. Your general practitioner will check to make sure that the sealants are in place during your checkups.

Source: Academy of General Dentistry; American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry; Centers for Disease Control; Johns Hopkins Medical Institute; and National Institutes of Health.



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