

DENTAL SEALANTS

Sealants help to prevent tooth decay by keeping germs and food out of hard-to-brush areas on your back teeth. Sealants are thin, plastic coatings painted on the chewing surfaces of your back teeth (premolars and molars) where you need extra protection. These chewing surfaces are rough and uneven, with pits and grooves. Plaque accumulates in the deep grooves of these teeth, and the acid from bacteria in the plaque attacks the tooth enamel, causing cavities. Brushing and flossing cannot always get into these areas.

The procedure for sealants is quick and painless. First, your tooth is cleaned and dried. Then an acidic solution is used to make the surface a little rough so that the sealant can attach securely. Then liquid sealant is applied, hardening in seconds to form a protective shield over tooth enamel.

It is generally recommended that children get sealants on their permanent molars as soon as the teeth come in, before decay begins. The first permanent molars come in between the ages of 5 and 7, and the second permanent molars come in when a child is

between ages 11 and 14. Besides molars, other teeth with pits and grooves also might need to be sealed. Teenagers and young adults who are prone to decay may also want to discuss sealants with their dentist.

It's important to keep baby teeth healthy so they don't fall out too early. If your child's baby teeth have deep pits and grooves, talk to your dentist about applying sealants.

Sealants can last up to 10 years, but they need to be checked routinely to make sure they are not chipped or worn away. Your

dentist or dental hygienist can repair sealants by adding more sealant material.

Although most people are not aware of this procedure, sealants have been around since the 1960s and have proven to be safe and effective. Some schools have sealant programs for their students.

Remember, dental sealants work only on the chewing surfaces of the treated teeth. You still need regular brushing and flossing, along with fluoride, to protect the gums and smooth surfaces of your teeth.

