

Tooth decay often occurs on the chewing surfaces of back teeth. The good news is that sealants can offer major protection against cavities.

# sealants

## KNOW - HOW



Chewing surface before sealant



Tooth protected by shaded sealant

① **What causes tooth decay?** Your teeth are covered with a sticky film of bacteria, called plaque. Plaque bacteria use sugar and starch in food as a source of energy. The bacteria convert the sugar or starch into harmful acids that attack tooth enamel. Repeated attacks may cause the enamel to break down, resulting in cavities.

② **What is a sealant?** A sealant is a plastic material that is usually applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth – premolars and molars. The depressions and grooves (pits and fissures) of the chewing surfaces of back teeth can be extremely difficult to keep clean. Some of the pits and fissures are so narrow and deep

that the bristles of a tooth-brush cannot reach into them. These areas are snug places for plaque and bits of food to hide and are especially prone to decay. The sealant – a plastic resin – bonds into the pits and fissures and acts as a barrier, protecting enamel from plaque and acids.

③ **How are sealants applied?** It usually takes only a few minutes to seal each tooth. The teeth that will be sealed are cleaned. Then the chewing surfaces are conditioned to help the sealant adhere to the tooth. The sealant is then 'painted' onto the tooth enamel, where it bonds directly to the tooth and hardens. Sometimes a special curing light is used to help the sealant harden.

④ **How long do sealants last?** As long as the sealant remains intact, the tooth surface will be protected from decay. Sealants usually last several years before a reapplication is needed. During your regular dental visits, your dentist will check the condition of the sealants and reapply them when necessary.

⑤ **Are sealants just for kids?** The likelihood of developing pit and fissure decay begins as soon as the back teeth erupt, so children and teenagers are obvious candidates. But adults can also be at risk for this type of decay and can benefit from sealants as well. Ask your dentist whether sealants can put extra power behind *your* prevention program.

ADA American Dental Association®

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KNOW - HOW

*What are other ways to prevent tooth decay and maintain a healthy mouth?*

- ① Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste and clean between the teeth daily with floss or other interdental cleaners.
- ② Eat a balanced diet and limit snacks.
- ③ Visit your dentist regularly, and ask your dentist how to get the fluoride you need.
- ④ When shopping for toothbrushes, toothpaste and other oral care products, choose those that bear the ADA Seal of Acceptance – a sign that a dental product has met ADA criteria for safety and effectiveness.



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