

# Sealants

## What are Dental Sealants?

Dental sealants are thin plastic coatings which are applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth to prevent decay. Most tooth decay in children and adolescents occurs on the chewing surfaces of these back teeth, which are called molars. This is because molars have irregular surfaces with pits and grooves which tend to trap food and bacteria debris. Sealants flow into and coat these pits and grooves so that bacteria cannot multiply and cause decay.

## Why is Sealing a Tooth Better than Filling a Cavity?

Sealants help maintain sound teeth. Decay destroys the structure of the tooth. Each time a tooth is filled, or a filling is replaced, additional tooth structure is lost. Amalgam fillings last an average of six to eight years before they need to be replaced. Appropriate use of sealants can save time, money, and the discomfort associated with restorative dental procedures.

## How are Sealants Applied?

Applying sealants is quite straightforward. 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 very slightly so that the sealant will bond to it properly. 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 therefore cannot cause decay. Applying sealants requires **no drilling** or removal of the tooth surface. Tooth structure is left intact – healthy teeth are protected from decay forming bacteria.

## How Long Will Dental Sealants Last?

A sealant application can last up to five years and often even longer. Sealants should be checked regularly and reapplied when they appear to have worn off. Because teeth are most susceptible to decay when they are young, preventing decay during the first 5 to 14 years after a tooth erupts is critical.

## How do Sealants Fit into a Preventative Dentistry Program?

For maximum benefit, sealants should be used as part of a child's total preventative dental care. A dentist should examine the child's teeth and gums regularly to check bite, tooth eruption, and the condition of both hard and soft tissues. A complete preventive dentistry program should also include: brushing and flossing, use of fluoride, good nutrition, and regular dental check-ups.

## Have Sealants Been Thoroughly Tested?

**Yes!** Thousands of children across the United States and in other countries have had their teeth sealed in controlled clinical studies. These studies have shown sealants to be effective, easy-to-apply, inexpensive and non-toxic. **That's why the American Dental Association, the National Institute of Dental Research, and the American Public Health Association have recommended sealants.**

## POST-OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS FOR DENTAL SEALANTS

Please follow these instructions following the placement of your child's dental sealants.

Once sealants are light cured, your child may resume normal eating and drinking.

The sealants placed today are guaranteed by this office for 1 year if your child attends his/her check-up and cleaning appointments every 6 months.

Your child should **avoid hard/sticky food/candies** to prevent fractures of his/ her sealants.

This could pull out his/her sealants if not avoided.

Sealants **do not prevent all** decay. Flossing is still needed to protect the sides of your child's teeth.