

WHAT IS A SEALANT?

It is a plastic material (resin) applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth — the premolars and molars. The resin bonds to the depressions and grooves (called pits and fissures) in the back teeth. A sealant is a barrier that protects tooth enamel from plaque and acids.



WHY ARE SEALANTS NECESSARY?

The back teeth have uneven pits and fissures that are difficult to keep clean because toothbrush bristles cannot reach into them. The pits and fissures hold plaque and food debris. Most tooth decay occurs in these hard-to-clean grooves. Sealants form a thin covering to keep out plaque and debris and decrease the risk of decay.

HOW ARE SEALANTS APPLIED?

It takes only a few minutes to seal each tooth. The procedure, which is virtually painless, rarely involves drilling or anesthesia.

The teeth are cleaned and chewing surfaces are conditioned to help the sealant adhere to the tooth. The sealant is “painted” onto the chewing surface, where it flows into the pits and fissures, bonds to the tooth and

hardens. A special curing light may be used to help the sealant harden.

HOW LONG DO SEALANTS LAST?

As long as the resin remains intact the chewing surface is protected from decay. Sealants hold up well under the force of normal chewing. They usually last several years before reapplication is needed. The dentist checks the condition of the sealants during a checkup.

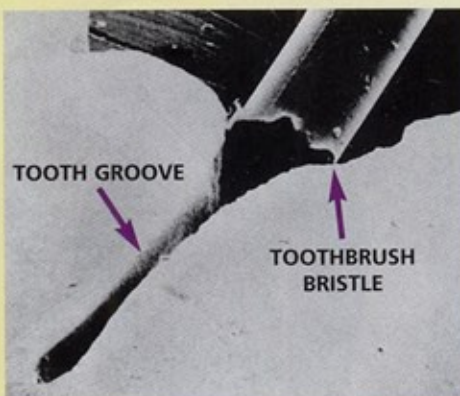
CAN SEALANTS PROTECT AGAINST ALL DECAY?

Sealants protect the chewing surfaces. Good oral hygiene at home and regular dental checkups and professional teeth cleaning are important to prevent tooth decay in between the teeth — spots that sealants cannot cover. To prevent cavities from forming between teeth (called inter-

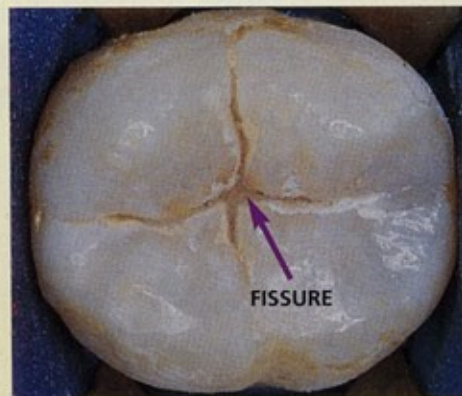
proximal decay), floss or use an interdental cleaner once a day and brush twice a day. Look for products that display the ADA Seal of Acceptance, your assurance that the product has met the ADA’s criteria for safety and effectiveness.

WHO IS A CANDIDATE FOR SEALANTS?

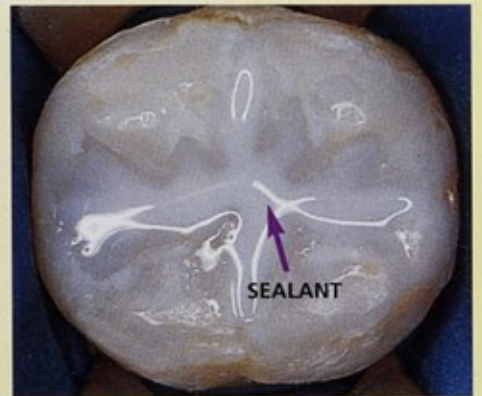
Children and teenagers are primary candidates for sealants because the likelihood of developing decay begins as soon as the back teeth appear. Sealants are usually placed on the surfaces of teeth that have not been previously filled and show no signs of decay. Adults can benefit from sealants too. Prevention is always better than treatment. Sealants are extremely effective in preventing tooth decay on the back teeth and can save patients money in the long run.



A single toothbrush bristle is too large to reach inside and clean the groove on this tooth.



A molar's chewing surface before the sealant.



A sealant protects the chewing surfaces of a molar.