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Protecting Teeth with Dental Sealants

What are dental sealants?

- ✓ Dental sealants are thin coatings applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth to prevent decay (or cavities). Most tooth decay in children and teenagers occurs on the chewing surfaces where pits and grooves trap food and germs.
- ✓ Sealants fill in these pits and grooves so germs cannot get inside the tooth and break down the tooth.
- ✓ Applying sealants does not take away any part of the natural tooth.
- ✓ Dental sealants stop 80% of cavities from starting in the back teeth, where 9 in 10 cavities occur.

How are sealants applied?

- ✓ First the teeth are cleaned and then dabbed with a mild liquid similar in strength to vinegar or lemon juice. The tooth is then rinsed and dried so the sealant will stick to it.
- ✓ When the tooth is ready, the sealant is painted onto the tooth. It flows into the pits and grooves and hardens in about 60 seconds.
- ✓ After sealing the tooth, bacteria cannot reach the pits and grooves and cause decay.

Will sealants make teeth feel different?

- ✓ Sealants are very thin and only fill the pits and grooves of the tooth. At first, they may feel a little different for a couple of days.

How long will dental sealants last?

- ✓ A sealant can last five years or more. Sealants should be checked regularly, and have another sealant placed if it has worn off. Molar teeth should have a sealant put on as soon as it appears in the mouth to protect it from a cavity. This is typically between ages 6 and 11-12 years of age.

Why is sealing a tooth better than waiting for decay and filling a cavity?

- ✓ Sealants help to keep teeth healthy by protecting them from decay. Each time a tooth has a filling because of decay, the cavity needs to be drilled out, and more and more of the natural tooth structure is lost. Stopping a tooth from needing a dental filling by using dental sealants saves the tooth, time, money, and is painless.

Resources

NOTE: This fact sheet was derived from one previously published by the Arizona Department of Health Services.

American Dental Association

https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/s/sealants?utm_source=mouthhealthy&utm_medium=mhtopstories&utm_content=sealants

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/pdf/2016-10-vitalsigns.pdf>