



Sealants: Shielding Against Dental Tooth Decay

Parents want the best of everything for their children, including healthy teeth. And to ensure a beautiful smile that will last a lifetime, it is important to protect your child's teeth against dental decay. One of the most effective defenses against dental decay is the application of sealants to your child's teeth.

What is a Sealant?

A sealant is a clear or shaded liquid material that is painted into the grooves of the back teeth, known as molars. The grooves of the molars are the areas most susceptible to decay. The sealant greatly decreases the likelihood that the tooth will decay.

Why Are Sealants Necessary?

The chewing surfaces of the back teeth have natural deep grooves and depressions. The area is susceptible to decay because the bristles of a toothbrush don't always reach them and plaque (a sticky, colorless deposit of bacteria) can easily settle into the grooves. Sealants protect these vulnerable areas by "sealing out" plaque and food. By sealing the grooves, you're creating a barrier to protect against the deposit of food and plaque, and decreasing the risk of tooth decay.

How Is A Sealant Applied?

Sealants are typically applied by your dentist or hygienist during a scheduled dental appointment. For the sealant to bond with a tooth, the tooth must first be cleaned to remove any debris. Then it is treated with a weak acidic solution (which is rinsed away) to help the sealant adhere to the tooth. Finally, the sealant is brushed on the tooth and hardened with a special light.

How Long Do Sealants Last?

Sealants vary somewhat in their longevity. Part of this depends upon the bond achieved. The tooth location and hygiene habits of the patient also influence how long sealants will last. Generally, sealants have a very high success rate and can last up to 10 years. For the maximum benefit from a sealant, it is recommended that children practice a complete preventive care program that includes regular brushing, flossing, and dental check-ups. The American Dental Association encourages parents to begin proper oral hygiene practices soon after the eruption of the first tooth, which can range anywhere from six to 12 months of age.

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