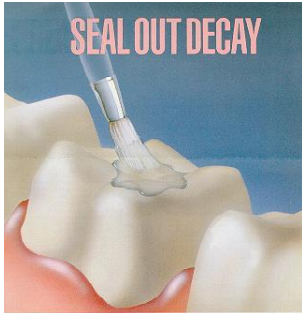


Feeling the Groove*

Are sealants for you?



In the history of tooth decay prevention – *a lesson you won't find on the History Channel* – two breakthroughs stand out: fluoride and **sealants**. While fluoride treatments help defend the teeth against decay, sealants offer further protection.

Because of their many bumps and grooves, the chewing surfaces of the back teeth (molars) are highly susceptible to cavities. Food and resulting bacteria may become lodged between the grooves (called pits and fissures) of a tooth.

Children in cavity-prone years (aged four to 17) and adults all face the same pit and fissure problem. Premolars and molars have the most pits and fissures, and are difficult to reach with a toothbrush or dental floss no matter how old you are.

The sealant acts as a barrier, protecting enamel from plaque and acids. Thorough brushing and flossing help remove food particles and plaque from smooth surfaces of teeth. But toothbrush bristles cannot reach all the way into the depressions and grooves. For the last 30 years, sealants have protected these vulnerable areas by "sealing out" plaque and food.

Are sealants safe?

The sealant contains dental resins containing Bisphenol A -based materials (BPA). BPA is used primarily to make plastics. Small amounts of BPA may leach from dental sealants immediately after application to teeth. No BPA has been detected in blood samples, indicating that there is no detectable systemic exposure to BPA from dental sealants.

A review of key studies on dental resins containing BPA-based materials reveals that the highest reported oral exposure to BPA is more than 50,000 times lower than levels shown to cause oral toxicity in animal studies. Consequently, exposure to BPA from dental resins for both adults and children is minimal and poses no known risk to human health.

For additional information, see the statement from the [American Dental Association](#) and a summary of a study from the [Journal of the American Dental Association](#).

Sealants are just for kids, right?

The likelihood of developing pit and fissure decay begins early in life, so children and teenagers are obvious candidates. *But adults can benefit from sealants as well.* (With one caveat, sealants are applied only to "virgin" teeth – those without fillings.)

The dental sealant procedure is usually performed on baby teeth soon after they erupt, and repeated at regular intervals over the years. Since the sealant is gradually lost through natural wear and tear of the teeth, the application must be repeated to remain effective.

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

Decay damages teeth permanently. Sealants protect them. Sealants can save time, money, and the discomfort sometimes associated with dental fillings. Fillings are not permanent. Each time a tooth is filled, more drilling is done and the tooth becomes a little weaker.

It is important to note that sealants do not replace fluoride. Rather, they add to the benefits of fluoride, and may preserve teeth so that they do not decay or require more extensive dental

procedures later on. Sealants keep germs and food particles out of the grooves by covering them with a safe plastic coating. Sealants and fluorides work together to prevent tooth decay.

How long do they last?

A sealant can last for as long as 5 to 10 years. Sealants should be checked at your regular dental appointment and can be reapplied if they are no longer in place.

Sealants are one part of a total preventive dental care. A complete preventive dental program also includes fluoride, twice-daily brushing, wise food choices, and regular dental care.



http://www.cdc.gov/ORALHEALTH/publications/factsheets/sealants_faq.htm

<http://www.ada.org/public/topics/sealants.asp>

<http://www.yourdentistryguide.com/sealants/>

<http://www.bisphenol-a.org/human/dental.html>