

Marc D. Cohen, D.D.S.
Jana L. Kaye, D.D.S.
16311 Ventura Blvd., Suite 1250, Encino, CA 91436
818 789-0555

DENTAL SEALANTS

Our teeth are constantly being covered with a sticky film of bacteria, called plaque. When we eat or drink anything that contains sugars, such as cookies, candy, soda, juice, fruit and many other foods and beverages, bacteria turn the sugar into acids that can attack tooth enamel. For some people, repeated attacks may eventually result in decay. The good news is that there is a way to protect your teeth and prevent decay. The likelihood of developing tooth decay on the chewing surface begins shortly after teeth come into the mouth, so children and teenagers are obvious candidates for sealants. Adults can benefit from sealants, too, because you never “outgrow” the risk for developing cavities.

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One of the most common places that tooth decay develops is on the chewing surfaces of the back teeth, the premolars and molars. When you run your tongue along the chewing surface of the back teeth, you can feel depressions and grooves. These indentations, called pits and fissures, help to grind food.

Regular brushing and cleaning between teeth with floss or another inter-dental cleaner help remove food particles and bacteria from the smooth surfaces of the tooth enamel. However, it's difficult to keep the pits and fissures clean. That's because toothbrush bristles can't reach into the grooves of your back teeth to remove plaque, bacteria and tiny particles of food.

WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

Because the grooves on the back of your teeth are hard to keep clean, we may recommend dental sealants. A dental sealant is a plastic material that is applied to a chewing surface of a back tooth. The sealant acts as a barrier, protecting enamel by “sealing out” plaque and food.

HOW ARE SEALANTS APPLIED?

Sealants are easy to apply, and it takes only a few minutes to seal each tooth. First, the teeth that will be sealed are cleaned and prepared to accept the sealant. The sealant is then painted onto the tooth enamel, where it bonds directly to the tooth and hardens. Sealants are generally clear or white and cannot be seen when you smile or talk.

HOW LONG DO SEALANTS LAST?

As long as the sealant remains intact, the tooth's chewing surface will be protected from plaque and food. Sealants, which hold up well under force of everyday chewing, can last a few years before a reapplication is needed. However, it is important to see the dentist regularly to check that the sealant remains intact.