Are sealants really necessary?

Sealants are not needed if you or your child can stop decay from occurring. This may require changes in eating and brushing habits:

- limit sugar and refined carbohydrate products in your food and drinks
- effective brushing with a fluoride toothpaste morning and night
- cut down on sweet snacks and sweetened drinks

If decay is beginning to develop, your dental professional may suggest that sealants be placed over the back teeth that are still healthy to protect them from acid attack and reduce the need for fillings at a later date.

Dental sealants are sometimes used to provide a protective coating for a faulty filling that might otherwise need replacing, or to protect exposed root surfaces.

Once a tooth has a filling, it is not as strong as an unfilled tooth, and has a greater risk of developing further decay – the larger the filling, the weaker the remaining tooth structure.

Your dental professional will try to help you keep your teeth free of fillings to ensure that you will have healthy teeth throughout your life.

Dental sealants –

- are a clear or tooth-coloured protective coating
- protect deep grooves in molar teeth and hard to clean surfaces
- require no injections
- usually no drilling necessary
- keep healthy teeth from needing fillings

Magic cure?

No!
Long-term success will still depend on you

Your dentist may recommend dental sealants to help you avoid decay, but you may also need:

- additional fluoride mouthrinses or toothpaste to strengthen your teeth
- changes to your diet and eating habits
- changes to your brushing habits

Further information can be obtained from the Dental Practice Education Research Unit, Dental School, The University of Adelaide, South Australia 5005.

Telephone (08) 8303 5438
Toll Free 1800 805 738
Fax (08) 8303 4858
Email dperu@adelaide.edu.au
Website www.adelaide.edu.au/socprev-dent/dperu
After every meal or snack, teeth are under attack from food acids.

Some people are at a higher risk of decay.

Dental sealants are a special protective coat of clear or tooth-coloured ‘resin’ that can help prevent cavities.

Extra protection for teeth

‘acid attack’ follows every meal, snack or drink

A dental sealant is a thin but strong plastic coat that is painted onto teeth to provide a protective barrier against acid attack. Dental sealants are mostly used to cover the deep grooves in the biting surfaces of healthy back teeth of patients who are at higher risk of decay.

Teeth are attacked by:
- acid produced by plaque bacteria; and
- acidic foods and drinks.

Acids cause damage below the tooth surface, causing microscopic holes in the tooth. If the acid damage continues over a long period of time, the tooth becomes so fragile that a hole becomes visible in the tooth.

As the hole gets bigger, the tooth will need a filling.

Why sealants may be recommended for some teeth

During each visit your dental professional will assess your (or your child’s) risk of decay. If teeth are considered to be at risk, dental sealants may be recommended for the tooth surfaces that are most likely to develop cavities. Sealants will stop the need for fillings later on, but...

...sealants don’t last forever.

Regular check-ups are essential to make sure that dental sealants are still fully covering the risk area, otherwise decay may occur. If even part of the protective coat is lost, the tooth will be at risk again.

Figure 1
Acid attack – protective sealant can stop the rot

Figure 2
Fissure seal protecting a healthy tooth on the left.