

# How Dental Sealants

## Protect Your Teeth



When you eat or drink anything with sugar and starch in it, oral bacteria thrives and creates a sticky acidic covering on your teeth called plaque. Getting rid of the plaque is easy: all you have to do is brush, thoroughly and promptly, after every meal. Do a good enough job, especially on the molars, and you may never get a single cavity.

The fact is, though, that some people are more vulnerable to cavities than others. You might find that even when you are careful about brushing gently and thoroughly anytime you eat or drink anything, you still end up getting cavities on a regular basis. It can be discouraging.

Teeth are not identically shaped or formed; your tooth enamel might be unusually thin, for example, and you might also have some deep grooves on the molars that are extremely difficult to brush. You are eventually going to get some damage to your tooth enamel from the cumulative effects of the acid. If you skip brushing your teeth, or you aren't as thorough as you ought to be, it will probably happen sooner than later. Either way, the day will come (probably during a routine visit to have your teeth checked and cleaned) that your dentist will want to schedule giving you a filling.

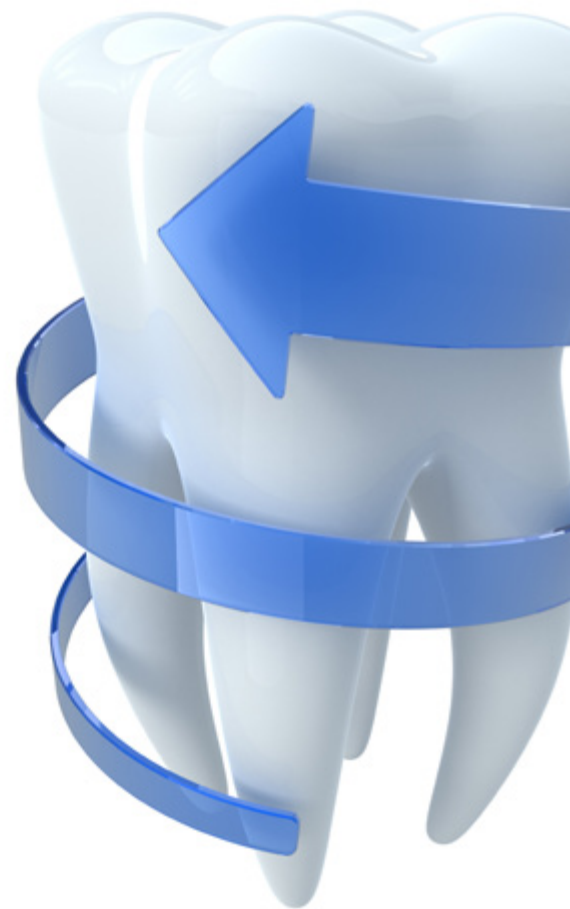
You probably won't be too happy to hear that, and your dentist won't be, either. The whole goal of dental care is to prevent as many problems as

possible, because it is less expensive and easier on the patient. That's why dentists came up with the idea of a dental sealant in the 1960s, with FDA approval and availability starting in the early 1970s. The way a sealant works is actually pretty simple: your dentist can use the sealant to fill in the pits and fissures on your molars. The sealant is plastic. It applies wet and then dries to form a durable barrier between your teeth and the harmful bacteria or plaque that cause problems. This barrier is effective because it protects the very places in your teeth where you are most likely to develop cavities.

Children and teenagers are good candidates for dental sealants, because a great deal of dental damage can occur during the developmental years when good oral hygiene habits are still being learned. Adults can benefit too, especially in cases where a person does have thin enamel and may be deep pits and grooves in the teeth as well. Once dry, the sealant can hold up for five to ten years before a dentist will need to apply a new

protective layer. It's easy for the dentist to check the sealant during the twice-yearly exam in order to make sure that the sealant is still doing its job.

Although sealants can be remarkably effective, they don't replace taking good care of your teeth. It is still important to brush, floss, and use mouthwash on a regular and frequent basis — at least twice a day on brushing, four times a week on flossing, and once a day on mouthwash. You should also limit snacking between meals, especially if you won't be able to brush afterward.



If you are interested in the benefits of getting a sealant, start by talking with our office so we can determine whether a sealant would work for you.