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# Tooth Sealants

This information is provided to inform you about the concept of sealing the grooves on teeth.

**Why Seal Teeth?** Over the past 40 or more years, numerous materials and techniques have been developed to seal the top (occlusal) surfaces of teeth. These procedures are necessary because many teeth have defective occlusal surfaces when they complete mineralization, and food debris and microorganisms penetrate into the tooth during eating. Patients cannot clean these areas effectively and dental decay (caries) occur frequently.

**Do All Teeth Need to Be Sealed?** Only the back (posterior) teeth sometime require sealing. We cannot tell which teeth require sealing, since the incomplete fusion of the teeth often leaves a nearly microscopic entry from the enamel outside of the tooth into the softer dentin inside. Therefore, for high caries risk children, it is suggested that all posterior teeth and selected anterior teeth be sealed.

**Will All Decay Be Prevented?** Maintained sealants can prevent the majority of decay on the **chewing** surfaces of the teeth. However, routine fluoride therapy is also recommended to decrease decay initiation on other surfaces of the teeth. Decay many begin between the teeth even if sealants have been placed if flossing and brushing are not adequate. Also, a high sugar diet/acidic food and beverage diet will contribute to tooth decay as well.

**What Is The Cost?** The cost of sealing a tooth with plastic is less than 1/4 the cost of filling (restoring) the tooth in the event of decay. Further, the sealant does not require cutting or weakening the tooth, while normal restorations do.

**How Long Do Sealants Last?** Studies show sealants last some years. However, re-sealing may be required, depending on diet and other factors.