

Sealing's the Deal...

I've always heard of the terrible two's, and it seemed like our little boy, Parker, was an exception to the rule. He was a sweet and loving two year old. Now, at three, he seems to be making up for lost time. As his dentist, my hope is to not have to fix any teeth for a while. Preventing problems is our main weapon for the time being.

Our kids receive daily dental exams simply out of habit. If you are a dentist and you are brushing teeth, you cannot help but to look for cavities. The American Dental Association, as well as many other non-dental doctor organizations recommends routine dental visits starting at the age of one. In our office, we call these "happy visits" and just try to get kids used to having a good experience at our office. It is very difficult to treat a six year old who has an abscessed tooth and has never been to the dentist. Take that same kid and put a series of positive experiences under their belt and we can help them when we're needed. As a matter of fact, we routinely see adults who have never returned to the dentist because of a bad childhood experience. That's why we go to great lengths to make everyone, young and old, comfortable in our office.

We live in an age of medicine where prevention is at a premium. We can take medicines to prevent a whole spectrum of problems from high cholesterol to, well, things that don't get as high as they used to. Modern medicine can actually fight problems before they arise, no pun intended.

Our goal, as dentists, is to prevent dental disease. There is the possibility that we will have a vaccine in the future that will prevent cavities. Until then, we have a solution called dental sealants.

To make a long, boring story short, cavities are caused by bacteria that live in the nooks, grooves, and valleys on and between your teeth. These bacteria excrete acid that dissolve tooth structure and cause cavities. You can prevent tooth decay by doing any of three things: (1) Reducing or removing the bacteria through rinses, brushing, and flossing, (2) Starve the bacteria by removing sugar and other sticky carbohydrates from your diet, or (3) Get rid of the places where these bacteria can hide from a toothbrush and floss. Sealants fit into category number three; they fill the grooves of your teeth where the bacteria hide. Modern sealant material also has the added benefit of "charging up" your teeth with fluoride to strengthen them in the future.

Dental sealants are pretty standard for children around ages six and twelve when they get their molar teeth in. We also see quite a few kids who could use sealants to prevent cavities on other teeth with deep grooves in them. Adults who suffer from decay later in life can also benefit from sealant therapy. I had my first sealants placed around the age of twenty-five and it sure beats having shots and fillings. As soon as we can get my kids to sit still in the chair, we're going to seal every nook and cranny we can find. If my son takes after me, he'll probably be about twenty-five.

I'm out of ink, so I'll explain the process next week. Until next time, keep smiling.

-Questions or comments can be sent to Drs. Parrish at ParrishDental@aol.com.