

To Seal a Tooth...

Last week, I discussed the advantages of dental sealants. As is usually the case, my thoughts outran the space allotted for my weekly musings. To that effect, I'd like to continue on about the actual placement of dental sealants.

For those of you who missed out, a dental sealant is a plastic coating that "seals" off the pits and fissures in your teeth that are prone to getting cavities. If bacteria cannot hide from your toothbrush, then they are less likely to excrete the waste that dissolves your teeth away. Sealants are a great idea for anyone, young or old, prone to getting cavities. As a secondary benefit, most modern sealant material contains fluoride and can "recharge" your teeth to help prevent decay.

Getting your teeth sealed is a completely painless procedure that can be performed by your dentist or hygienist. First, the grooves that need to be sealed are cleaned with a paste and/or an acidic solution to remove any debris and to allow the material to bond to your teeth. After this cleaning, the teeth are rinsed with water and thoroughly dried. A very small brush or fine tipped needle is then used to flow sealant material into any cracks or fissures that can get bacteria and food trapped in them. The material starts out runny to get into these areas and is then cured with a special light that hardens it into a protective coating. Sometimes, if a large number of teeth are sealed at one time, we will need to re-adjust your bite where the sealant material touches too high. This is often unnecessary because the sealant material is designed to wear down quickly in these areas.

That's it. No shots and no pain...your teeth are protected in a matter of minutes. Most sealants will last for years. Occasionally we see patients who break them off by chewing on ice, pens, paper clips, you name it. Unfortunately, sealants are not indestructible.

Besides children, there are two other instances where sealants make a lot of sense. I cannot count the number of young adults who go off to college and come back with a mouth full of cavities. Late nights with no curfews and cafeteria plans with unlimited soft drink refills are probably good suspects. It just makes sense to try to head this off by sealing any susceptible areas before your kids leave home. We also see a lot of adults who have dry mouth, usually due to certain types of prescription drugs. The less saliva you have, the faster cavities become a problem. Again, it makes common sense to seal off any areas that might become an issue if left exposed to bacteria.

Hopefully, I've made a boring subject a bit readable this week. Until next time, keep smiling.

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