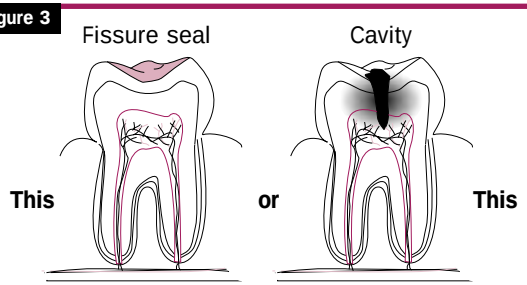
Figure 3



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

Sealants need to be checked regularly
leaky seal – risk of decay

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

DecayDecay

Dental sealants

A barrier protecting your teeth against decay

Magic cure?

THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE
Colgate Caries Control Program

Colgate Oral Care

Decay

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.

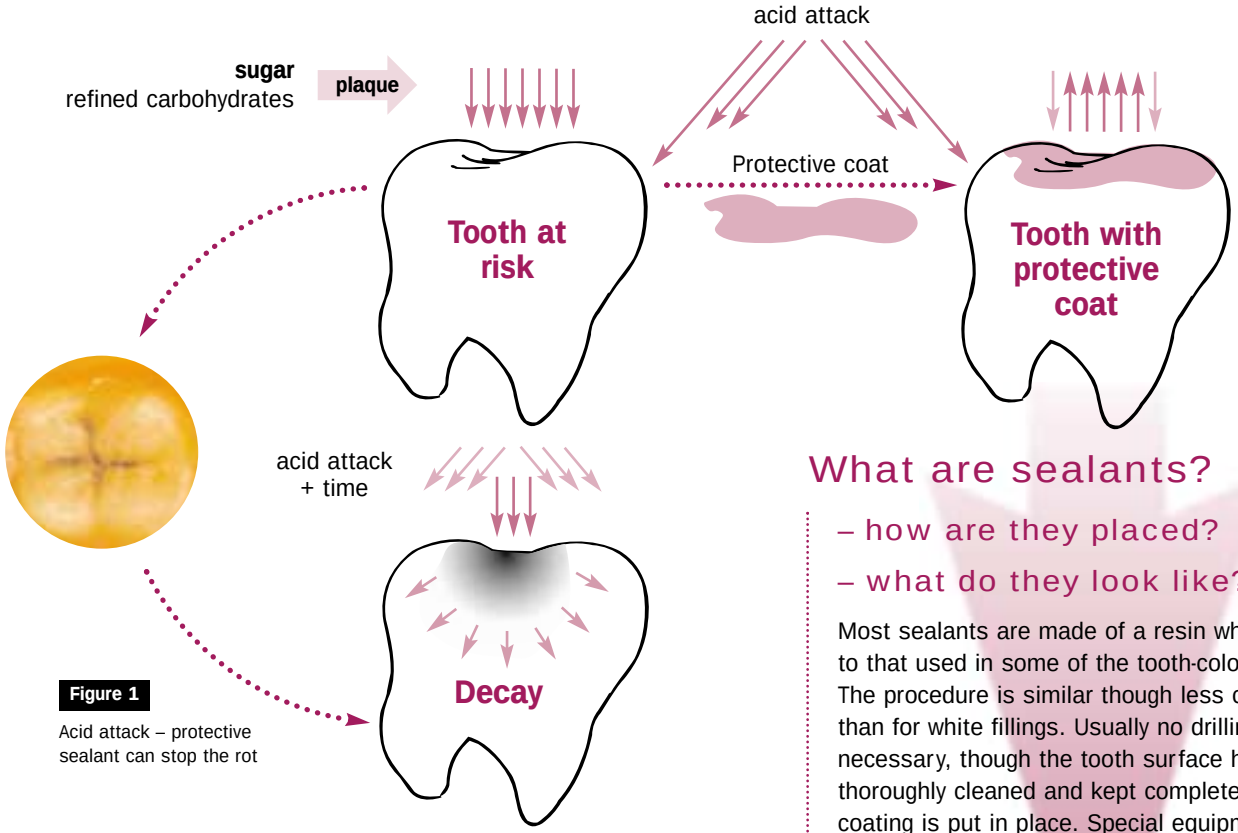


Figure 1

Acid attack – protective sealant can stop the rot

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.

What are sealants?

– how are they placed?

– what do they look like?

Most sealants are made of a resin which is similar to that used in some of the tooth-coloured fillings. The procedure is similar though less complicated than for white fillings. Usually no drilling is necessary, though the tooth surface has to be thoroughly cleaned and kept completely dry while the coating is put in place. Special equipment or lots of cotton rolls my be used to keep saliva away from the tooth.

Once placed, a strong light may be used to set the protective coating. You can eat on the finished sealant straight afterwards.

Figure 2

Fissure seal protecting a healthy tooth on the left.