ORAL FITNESS FACT SHEET

Fight Decay With Dental Sealants

You may wonder: "I brush and floss my teeth at least three times a day, avoid sugary food and between-meal snacks, see a dentist regularly, and drink fluoridated water instead of soda. But, I still get cavities."

Why? Because these measures are not as effective at protecting the pits and grooves (fissures) on the chewing surfaces of teeth. When you chew food, it can become trapped in these pits and fissures, especially if the fissures are thin and deep. Decay develops in those grooves because toothbrush bristles are too large to reach into these areas to remove the food and bacteria.

So how can decay in pits and fissures be prevented? By using dental sealants. A sealant is a clear or shaded plastic coating that is "painted" on the chewing surfaces of the back teeth.

Sealants:

- Lock out harmful bacteria and food from the pits and fissures.
- Can save you from having dental treatment such as fillings, crowns, root canals, extractions, or dentures.
- Are applied by using a small brush to paint a clear or white liquid on the tooth. A special light is usually used to help harden the coating.
- Are checked at your annual exam to be sure they haven't chipped or fallen off.

Sealants have been shown to benefit Soldiers. The 1994 Tri-Service Comprehensive Oral Health Survey of Active Duty personnel discovered that almost half of military dental patients 26 years of age or younger needed dental sealants. 25% of the patients in the study had new decay in the pits and fissures of their teeth that could have been prevented by using sealants.

Just as in vehicle maintenance where several tools are needed to check your engine, fighting decay requires using more than just one tool. At your next exam, ask your dentist if your teeth might benefit from dental sealants.

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