

## Seal out dental decay

# Sealants may help you avoid the extra time and money spent on procedures to fix decayed teeth.

You use the edges of your front teeth to tear food and you use your back teeth as “grinders”. The tops of these back teeth resemble miniature hills, valleys, and canyons that help you grind your food. These valleys and canyons (pits and grooves) can pose a dental health challenge.

These pits and grooves are especially prone to decay because they trap food and plaque. They are also relatively hard to reach with a toothbrush and the protective layer of enamel is usually thin. Dental sealants – a plastic resin material usually applied to the pit and groove surfaces of back teeth – can be helpful in decreasing the risk of cavities.

### How sealants work

Sealants act as barriers, protecting enamel from plaque and acids. Studies show that combined with regular dental visits and good home care, properly applied sealants are essentially 100 percent effective in protecting the affected tooth surfaces from cavities.<sup>1</sup> It's a simple procedure and a sealant can last many years, even up to five years or more. Your dentist should check periodically to make sure it has not chipped or worn away.

### Who should get sealants?

The likelihood of developing tooth decay begins early in life, so children and teenagers are obvious candidates. However, there may be advantages for adults as well, so ask your dentist if it's right for you. Children should be evaluated by their dentist to determine the need for sealants on their permanent molars/premolars as soon as they erupt – before a cavity has a chance to start in one of the grooves. The first permanent molars typically erupt between the ages of 5 and 7, while the second permanent molars do so between the ages of 11 and 14. Other teeth such as baby molars, permanent pre-molars, and certain front teeth may be candidates for sealants depending on how deep the pits and grooves are. A simple check by your dentist will tell you which ones need treatment.



Check with your dentist to see if sealants might be right for you and/or your family.

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<sup>1</sup>Academy of General Dentistry, [www.agd.org](http://www.agd.org), 2007. "CIGNA Dental" refers to the following operating subsidiaries of CIGNA Corporation: Connecticut General Life Insurance Company, and CIGNA Dental Health, Inc. and its operating subsidiaries and affiliates. This document is provided by CIGNA solely for informational purposes to promote consumer health. It does not constitute medical advice and is not intended to be a substitute for proper dental care provided by a dentist. CIGNA assumes no responsibility for any circumstances arising out of the use, misuse, interpretation or application of any information supplied in this document. Always consult with your doctor for appropriate examinations, treatment, testing, and care recommendations. 02/09 ©2009 CIGNA