Evaluation of pumice, fissure enameloplasty and air abrasion on sealant microleakage

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this in vitro study was to evaluate microleakage of pit and fissure sealants after using three different pit and fissure preparation techniques: (1) traditional pumice prophylaxis and acid etching, (2) fissure enameloplasty and acid etching and (3) air abrasion and acid etching.

Methods: Sixty extracted third molars with no clinical evidence of caries were randomly divided into 3 groups of 20 each. Teeth were prepared using 1 of 3 occlusal surface treatments prior to placement of Delton® opaque light-cured sealant. The teeth were thermocycled between 5±2°C and 55±2°C for 500 cycles with a dwell time of 30 seconds and then stored in 0.9% normal saline. All teeth were sealed apically and coated within 1.5 mm of the sealant margin with two layers of nail varnish. The teeth were immersed in a 1% solution of methylene blue for 24 hours to allow dye penetration into possible gaps between enamel and sealant. Three buccolingual cuts parallel to the long axis of the tooth were made yielding 4 sections and 6 surfaces per tooth for analysis. The surfaces were scored 0 to 3 for extent of microleakage using a binocular microscope at 25X magnification.

Results: Kruskal-Wallis and t tests revealed no significant difference in microleakage between the 3 fissure preparation methods prior to sealant placement.

Conclusions: Neither air abrasion nor enameloplasty followed by acid etching produced significantly less microleakage than the traditional pumice prophylaxis with acid etching technique. (Pediatr Dent 24:199-203, 2002)

KEYWORDS: SEALANTS, MICROLEAKAGE, AIR ABRASION, ENAMELOPLASTY

Sealing pits and fissures in teeth is a widely advocated preventive technique. A nagging issue is identification of the ideal regimen for placement of sealants to maximize retention and prevent microleakage. Inhibiting marginal leakage is important for sealant success because the seepage of bacteria beneath a sealant may support caries initiation and progression.1,2 There is no clear consensus relative to the best method of cleaning pits and fissures prior to applying etchant and sealant. Salivary pellicles, organic debris and handpiece lubricating oil have all been identified as potential contaminants of the tooth surface that may lead to marginal leakage or loss of the sealant.3 Removal of enamel surface contaminants and obtaining a properly acid-etched surface prior to sealant placement are important factors for successful retention and caries prevention.3,4

The pumice prophylaxis and acid-etch technique is still considered by most clinicians the standard for cleaning fissures prior to sealant application. This typically involves a prophylaxis with an aqueous slurry of pumice, acid etching for 60 seconds and rinsing for a minimum of 10 seconds. Ripa5 concluded in a comprehensive review of sealants that there was insufficient evidence to warrant changes in the traditionally recommended pumice procedure. However, it has also been shown that cleaning the fissures with flour of pumice using rotary instruments in a slow-speed handpiece followed by etching does not remove all of the pellicle and debris.6

More recently, alternative methods such as bur preparation and air abrasion have been proposed to better clean pits and fissures of debris. Enameloplasty, or fissure enlargement with a bur, has been advocated as a technique that enhances retention by allowing deeper penetration of etchant and sealant and increasing surface area for bonding.7 Air abrasion has also been suggested as a pretreatment method to mechanically roughen enamel in a conservative and time-efficient manner and remove residual organic material.
in the fissures to aid in sealant bonding. However, marginal leakage studies have shown that air abrasion alone is not as effective as air abrasion coupled with acid etching in preventing microleakage.

Researchers have used dye penetration to evaluate potential sealant leakage and the susceptibility of a tooth to caries. Conflicting results have been reported by the few studies comparing microleakage of sealants prepared by traditional pumice and etch to those prepared by bur or air abrasion coupled with acid etching. Therefore, the search continues for the most effective enamel surface preparation to enhance sealant integrity.

The aim of this in vitro study was to compare the microleakage of pit and fissure sealants after using three different preparation techniques: (1) traditional pumice prophylaxis and acid etching, (2) fissure enameloplasty and acid etching and (3) air abrasion and acid etching.

**Methods**

Sixty noncarious and unrestored extracted third molars chosen to best represent the anatomy of first permanent molars (30 mandibular and 30 maxillary) were stored and refrigerated in 0.1% chloramine. For group allocation purposes, the teeth were numbered 1 to 60. They were randomly divided into 3 groups of 20 each, with 10 maxillary and 10 mandibular teeth per group. The treatment groups were prepared as follows:

Group 1: Traditional pumice prophylaxis and acid etching. All fissures were cleaned for 15 seconds with an aqueous slurry of 5 g pumice/4 mL water using a disposable rotating bristle brush in a slow-speed, contra-angle handpiece. The teeth were rinsed with air-water spray, dried using compressed air and etched with 37% liquid phosphoric acid for 60 seconds as recommended by the sealant manufacturer (Delton® Opaque, Dentsply Professional, York, PA).

Group 2: Enameloplasty with a carbide fissure bur (Fissurotomy™ Bur #18010, SS White, Ivoclar North America, Inc.) and acid etching. The teeth were numbered 1 to 60. They were randomly divided into 3 groups of 20 each, with 10 maxillary and 10 mandibular teeth per group. The treatment groups were prepared as follows:

Group 3: Air abrasion and acid etching. The Mach 5.0 air abrasion unit (Kreativ, Inc., San Diego, Calif) was used according to the manufacturer’s directions with 27.5 μm aluminum oxide particles for 10 seconds at 40 psi, Micropulse™ mode, and beam intensity of 2 gm/min. The handpiece measured 0.28 mm (0.011 in) in diameter at tip orifice and was held at a distance of 2 to 2.5 mm from the tooth. The occlusal surfaces were rinsed, dried and etched with 37% liquid phosphoric acid for 60 seconds.

An opaque light-cured sealant (Delton® Opaque, Dentsply Professional, York, Pa) was applied to the occlusal pits and fissures of all teeth in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions. The sealant was cured for 15 seconds on “normal” curing mode (400-500 nm) using the Kreativ Kuring Light (Kreativ, Inc., San Diego, Calif) according to the recommendations of the curing light and sealant manufacturers. The polymerizing light was calibrated and verified periodically to ensure constancy of light output power according to the manufacturer’s recommendations.

Each sealant was checked with an explorer for complete coverage and retention. All sealed teeth were stored in 0.9% normal saline less than 24 hours before thermocycling.

All of the teeth were thermocycled between 5±2°C and 55±2°C for 500 cycles with a dwell time of 30 seconds in each bath and a 30-second dwell time at room temperature between baths (2 min/cycle) followed by storage in 0.9% normal saline. The teeth were dried and the apices sealed with sticky wax. All tooth surfaces were painted within 1.5 mm of the sealant margin with a layer of nail varnish and allowed to dry. A second coat of nail varnish was applied and allowed to dry. The teeth were immersed in a 1% methylene blue solution for 24 hours at 37°C to allow dye penetration into possible gaps between enamel and sealant.

Upon removal from the dye, the teeth were rinsed with distilled water, positioned, and secured on glass slabs using sticky wax prior to sectioning. Three buccolingual sectioning cuts parallel to the long axis of each tooth were made, yielding 4 sections and 6 surfaces per tooth for analysis. A water-cooled 0.3 mm thick diamond wafering blade (Isomet™, Buehler, Lake Bluff, IL) mounted on a high-speed saw was used. The depth of dye penetration was evaluated by a single examiner blinded to the treatment regimen using a binocular microscope at 25X magnification according to the method described by Överbö and Raadal. The scoring method was (Fig 1):

- Score 0=no dye penetration
- Score 1=dye penetration restricted to the outer half of the sealant
- Score 2=dye penetration to the inner half of the sealant
- Score 3=dye penetration into underlying fissure

Each surface score was determined by the greatest dye penetration detected on the buccal occlusal and/or lingual occlusal fissure wall. The overall score for each tooth equaled the highest score of the 6 surfaces. Mean microleakage scores and standard errors were calculated for each treatment group.

Microleakage analysis at the section level used t tests to statistically examine the significance of the differences of
Results
Intraexaminer reliability for microleakage scoring was calculated using Kappa statistics prior to actual microleakage evaluation. The calibration was performed by the examiner assessing 45 sections on different days. Reliability for microleakage scoring produced a weighted Kappa of 0.90, indicating good reproducibility.

Section-level analysis
Table 1 shows the microleakage scores according to section-level analysis with 6 surface measurements per tooth totaling 360 scores. Statistical analysis using $t$ tests indicated no significant difference between the pumice, enameloplasty, and air-abrasion methods. No leakage (score=0) was found on 268 of 360 surfaces (74%). Dye penetration restricted to the outer half of the sealant (score=1) was noted in 58 of 360 views (16%). Thus, 90% of the sealant sections had minimal to no leakage. The diamond blade was of sufficient thickness (0.3 mm) to prevent adjacent surfaces from being “mirror images” of each other. For example, there were many instances in which one surface displayed microleakage, and the adjacent sectioned surface had no microleakage. The mean microleakage scores for the 3 treatment groups are listed in Table 2.

Tooth-level analysis
The distribution of microleakage scores for all 60 teeth is shown in Table 3, using the worst surface-level leakage score for each tooth. The air abrasion group had the most sealants exhibiting no leakage (score=0) at 35% (7/20), as well as the least number of sealants displaying maximum leakage (score=3) at 5% (1/20). The bur group showed no leakage in 25% (5/20) of sealants. The pumice group had the least number of sealants with no leakage (4/20) and the greatest number of sealants with maximum leakage (4/20). According to the Kruskal-Wallis test, there was no statistically significant difference ($P>0.05$) between the 3 treatment groups represented by the mean microleakage scores in Table 4.

When all sealants in the 3 groups were considered, 16/60 sealants showed no leakage in any section. Minimal leakage (ie, dye penetration restricted to the outer half of the sealant) was observed in 19/60 sealants. Hence, minimal or no leakage was found in 35/60 (58%) sealants. Maximum microleakage into the depth of the underlying fissure was found in only 8/60 (13%) sealants.

Discussion
A variety of fissure preparation methods have been used prior to sealant placement in an attempt to successfully inhibit microleakage and maximize retention. While sealants have gained acceptance as their retentive and microleakage properties have improved, their clinical success rate still remains less than ideal. A 5% to 10% annual sealant failure rate was reported following analysis of multiple studies. Consequently, the search for alternative preparation methods has continued to be an ongoing challenge.

In the present study, no significant difference in sealant microleakage was found between pumice, bur and air-abrasion preparation methods in combination with acid etching. This study’s results are supported by those of Mentes and Gencoglu. The 2 studies used the same scoring system by Övrebö and Raadal to analyze dye penetration. The air abrasion/etch group produced the lowest microleakage scores in both studies but not significantly lower than the other 2 treatment methods.

Similar results have been obtained in other microleakage studies. Xalabarde et al demonstrated no significant difference in microleakage when comparing enameloplasty and etch to pumice and etch. They evaluated 2 different types of burs, the Sorensen diamond and 1/4-round carbide, but neither reduced significantly marginal leakage. In a study by

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**Table 1. Distribution of Section-Level Microleakage Scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pumice</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bur</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air abrasion</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2. Mean Microleakage Scores – Section-Level Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparation method</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Treatment group mean</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pumice</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>0.467</td>
<td>0.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bur</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>0.383</td>
<td>0.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air abrasion</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>0.317</td>
<td>0.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>0.389</td>
<td>0.052</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3. Distribution of Tooth-Level Microleakage Scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pumice</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bur</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air abrasion</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4. Mean Microleakage Scores – Tooth-Level Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparation method</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Treatment group mean</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pumice</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bur</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air abrasion</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For all three paired $t$ tests, $P>0.2$
Zyskind et al., the extent of microleakage was comparable between bur and air abrasion preparation methods when acid etch was employed. A recent study by Guiquis et al. yielded similar results. The marginal leakage of preventive resin restorations placed in teeth prepared with air abrasion alone was compared to resin restorations placed after bur preparation or air abrasion coupled with acid etching. Significant microleakage was observed in the non-etched, air abraded specimens, while the resin prepared by bur/etch or air abrasion/etch produced similar microleakage results that were significantly less than air abrasion alone.

In contrast, Hatibovic-Kofman et al. reported bur preparation with a 1/4-round bur coupled with acid etching to be significantly better at reducing microleakage than pumice and etch. The difference in findings may be due to the use of different burs and preparation depths. They reported opening fissures to an approximate diameter of the 1/4-round bur, whereas this study used a light “sweep” of the grooves trying to remove as little tooth structure as possible. Geiger et al. demonstrated that the deeper the level of sealant penetration, the lower the probability of microleakage. The broad range of enameloplasty preparation depths reported by dentists in a 1995 survey of northern California pediatric dentists reinforces the observation that clinicians are not consistent with this technique.

Lending support to this study’s findings is an in vitro sealant study by Brown and Barkmeier that found no significant difference in bond strength between air abrasion and acid etch compared to acid etch alone. Similarly, a retention study conducted on extracted molars found that all acid-etched groups, which included a pumice, air abrasion, hydrogen peroxide and acid-etch alone group, generated equivalent mean shear bond strengths. In contrast, Geiger et al. demonstrated on extracted molars that sealant retention was significantly improved by bur preparation compared to non-prepared fissures. A 6-year clinical trial by Shapira et al. reported sealants prepared by enameloplasty/etch had a significantly higher retention rate than those prepared by pumice/etch on maxillary molars only.

The finding of no significant difference in microleakage between the 3 sealant pretreatment methods has several implications regarding sealant placement. First, it suggests that dentists may be using more aggressive sealant preparation techniques on sound, healthy tooth structure than is necessary. Secondly, air abrasion is not without disadvantages, as it often creates a substantial dust powder in the work area that requires additional time to clean up. Lastly, a dental auxiliary cannot legally perform any type of tooth structure removal, which includes air abrasion and enameloplasty techniques. Therefore, fissure preparation with these 2 procedures requires the dentist’s time rather than delegation to dental hygienists or qualified dental assistants.

Circumstances do present where bur or air abrasion preparation is obviously warranted. Suspected carious fissures should be prepared or explored by enameloplasty or air abrasion prior to sealant application to disclose potential caries. However, several studies have provided evidence that inadvertent sealing over carious lesions leads to arrest and not to caries progression. The need to routinely air abrade or mechanically prepare fissures prior to sealing is not supported in the literature.

This study’s results suggest that the method of pit and fissure cleaning is not the critical step in the sealant technique. It is more likely conditions such as tooth isolation and moisture control, eruption status of tooth, patient cooperation and a proper etch that determine sealant success. This study did not omit acid etching in the air abrasion group because the majority of previous studies have consistently demonstrated that the roughened surface produced by air abrasion alone lacks the seal obtained with acid etching.

The increased enamel resin tag formation that has been observed in SEM studies is one of the main benefits of acid etching. Resin tag formation provides micromechanical retention of the sealant to enamel interface and serves as the primary mechanism by which sealants bond to enamel fissures. This study’s findings suggest that it makes no difference what type of fissure preparation is used as long as it is followed by acid etching prior to sealant placement.

More recently, the addition of a bonding agent to the traditional sealant technique has shown promising results as a means of improving retention and microleakage. Feigal et al. found single-bottle bonding agents to reduce the usual risk of retention failures of occlusal sealants. Another study demonstrated a significant reduction in microleakage when a dentin-bonding agent was applied between a sealant and saliva-contaminated enamel interface. Self-etching adhesive systems have also been developed which may be able to improve and simplify the sealant process further, thus warranting more investigation.

This investigation was performed in vitro using extracted third molars. A controlled clinical trial is needed to further study the 3 preparation methods. Until microleakage and retention studies demonstrate conclusively one preparation method to be more effective than another at enhancing sealant success, it would seem prudent to continue using the traditional pumice and acid-etch technique. Based on the present findings, routine removal of healthy sound tooth structure prior to sealant placement does not seem justified.

**Conclusions**

1. Neither air abrasion nor enameloplasty followed by acid etching produced significantly less microleakage than the traditional pumice prophylaxis with acid etching technique.
2. This in vitro comparative study suggests that the conventional pumice prophylaxis with acid etching technique should remain the standard of practice for cleaning fissures prior to sealant placement.

202  Blackwood et al.  Sealant microleakage  Pediatric Dentistry – 24:3, 2002
References