

# Sealants

## protecting teeth from decay

A sealant is a hard plastic coating applied to the pits and fissures (grooves) on the chewing surfaces of teeth – in particular molars and premolars in both children and adults. It is used to as a barrier to protect the grooves from decay.

Our teeth are constantly covered in plaque – a sticky film of bacteria. When we eat and drink anything containing sugar or starch, the bacteria turns the sugar or starch into acid. This acid attacks tooth enamel and eventually causes decay. The grooves on our teeth are a major site of decay because the bristles on a toothbrush are too large to clean in these grooves.

### The Benefits of Sealants

- Proven to be effective in preventing decay for many years
- Require no injection or drilling
- Are invisible, either clear or tooth coloured
- Are relatively low cost compared to fillings

### Fissure Sealants

A sealant is a hard plastic coating applied to the pits and fissures (grooves) on the chewing surfaces of premolars and molars. It is used as a barrier to protect the grooves from decay where toothbrush bristles cannot clean.

- Sealants are best done as the teeth come through in the mouth on newly erupted teeth before bacteria have a chance to form decay.
- Provided the sealant stays intact, it can protect the grooves for many years. Regular check-ups are necessary to assess the sealants to ensure they have not chipped or decay is not forming underneath.
- Sealants require no injection or drilling and are relatively easy to place so they are comparatively lower cost than having a filling done.
- Sealants can be clear, white or tooth coloured



Decay forming in the grooves of a molar

### Preventive Resin Restorations (PRRs)

The PRR is similar to the fissure sealant and is commonly performed when there is evidence or possibility of decay in the grooves. The PRR is commonly done on teens and adults, on teeth with grooves that are 'stained' – meaning there is a good chance of finding decay deep in the groove.

- The grooves are initially investigated and any decay present is carefully removed prior to bonding a very minimal filling.
- In most cases the decay can be completely removed without discomfort and without the need for injection.
- Once the decay is fully removed the tooth is filled with a tooth coloured composite resin filling using conventional bonding techniques. This makes a durable, white filling in the groove which is sealed very effectively to the enamel.

It is best that a PRR is done early; almost immediately once the tooth has fully emerged from the gum and prior to any serious decay getting established in the grooves.