

What are sealants?

Sealants are a safe and painless way of protecting your teeth from decay. A sealant is a protective plastic coating, which is applied to the biting surfaces of the back teeth. The sealant forms a hard shield that keeps food and bacteria from getting into the tiny grooves in the teeth and causing decay.

Which teeth should be sealed?

Sealants are only applied to the back teeth – the molars and premolars. These are the teeth that have pits and fissures on their biting surfaces. Your dentist will tell you which teeth should be sealed after they have examined them, and checked whether the fissures are deep enough for sealing to help. Some teeth naturally form with deep grooves which can be sealed, others with shallow ones may not need sealing.

What is involved?

The process is usually quick and straightforward taking only a few minutes per tooth. The tooth is thoroughly cleaned, prepared with a special solution, and dried; the liquid sealant is then applied and allowed to set hard – usually by shining a bright light onto it.

Will I feel it?

No, it is totally pain free, and the teeth do not feel any different afterwards.

How long do they last?

Sealants usually last for many years, but your dentist will want to check things regularly to make sure that the seal is still intact. They can wear over time, and sometimes the dentist needs to add or replace some sealants to be sure that no decay can begin to form underneath them.

How do they work?

The sealant forms a smooth, protective barrier, by covering all the little grooves and dips in the surface of the tooth. Dental decay can easily start in these grooves.

When should this be done?

Sealants are often applied as soon as the permanent teeth start to come through. This is usually between 6 and 7 years of age. The rest are usually sealed as soon as they appear which can be any time between 11 and 14 years of age.

Do my children still have to clean their teeth?

Yes. It is vital that they do this. The smooth, sealed surface is now much easier to keep clean and healthy with normal tooth brushing. Using a fluoride toothpaste will also help to protect teeth. Pit and fissure sealing reduces tooth decay and the number of fillings which may be needed.

Whom do I ask about the treatment?

If you would like to know more about the treatment, ask your dentist or hygienist. They will tell you if fissure sealing will help your children's teeth and if it is the right time to do it.