

ROOT CANAL TREATMENT

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

The aim of root canal treatment (endodontic treatment) is to save a tooth that has been badly damaged due to decay, disease or injury.

Inside a tooth (a healthy tooth) is the pulp. This is the soft tissue deep inside a tooth which contains nerves, blood vessels and connective tissues. It extends from the tooth crown to the tip of each root. The pulp is important for the normal growth, development and health of the tooth. However; a fully developed tooth can function normally without a pulp if the root canal treatment has been successful.

Infection or inflammation of the pulp: can be caused by:

- a deep cavity
- repeated dental work on the tooth
- trauma (a knock)
- gum disease
- a crack or chip in the tooth
- extreme wear

Symptoms may include pain, sensitivity to hot or cold, tooth discolouration, and swelling or soreness in the gums surrounding the tooth.

If the pulp cannot repair itself, it will die and then become infected. Root canal treatment is then needed to save the tooth. To improve the chances of success, root canal treatment should be started as soon as possible.

All root canals in the affected tooth must be treated. The front teeth (incisors) have one root canal, premolars (bicuspid) have one or two canals, and molars usually have three sometimes four canals.

If the pulp of the root is not treated quickly, severe pain and abscesses (infection at the ends of the roots) can occur. If an abscess is left untreated, infection can damage the bone surrounding the root. If the tooth does not have endodontic treatment, it will have to be removed.

Root canal treatment of the tooth: the dentist will examine the tooth and take a radiograph (x-ray). A local anaesthetic will usually be given to block pain. A thin sheet of latex, called rubber dam is used to isolate the tooth and keep it clean and dry during treatment.

An opening through the tooth crown to the pulp is made with a dental drill. Using special instruments, the dentist will remove the inflamed or infected pulp. Each root canal is cleaned, enlarged and shaped. Anti-bacterial medicines may be put inside the root canal to help stop the infection. If a severe abscess has formed at the root tip, oral antibiotic tablets may be needed to help treat the infection.

You may need to make several visits to the dentist to complete the treatment. A temporary filling will protect the inside of the tooth between visits.

Pain or discomfort, if any usually lasts no more than a few days and will not be experienced by every patient. Some people may want to take a mild pain reliever.

Completion of root canal treatment: to protect the inside of the tooth and prevent further infection, the root canals are filled and the pulp chamber is sealed. A post may be inserted inside the tooth if it lacks enough structure to support an *artificial crown*. An endodontically treated tooth is at an increased risk of fracture without the protection of a crown. (See the crown and bridge pamphlet for more information).

Possible side effects: as with all dental/medical treatments, root canal treatment has risks. The following list of possible side effects is intended to inform you about some of the potential problems. As other uncommon complications may occur, the list is not complete.

Loss of tooth: root canal treatment can save most teeth, but it can not be guaranteed it will be successful.

Infection: in the tooth is likely to heal completely once treatment is undertaken. If infection becomes chronic, the tooth may have to be treated again or removed.

Discolouration: your tooth may lose its original whiteness and become darker, but can be treated by bleaching, a crown or veneer can be fitted.

Weakness: after root canal treatment your tooth is not as strong as a normal tooth. This is why crowns are recommended.

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