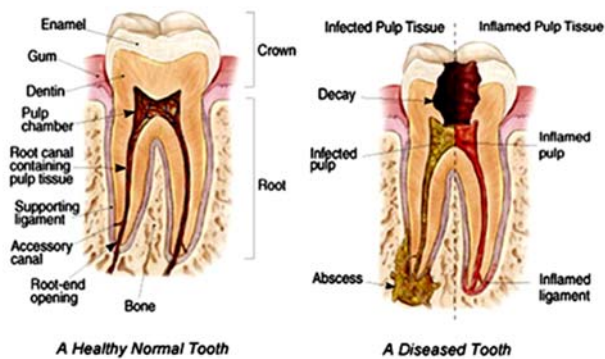


Root Canal Treatment

Root Canal Treatment (endodontics) is needed when the blood or nerve supply of the tooth (pulp) is damaged due to decay or injury. It is most often needed in teeth which have deep fillings, or in teeth which have deep dental decay.

Why is root canal treatment needed?

If the pulp becomes infected or inflamed, infection may spread through the root canal system of the tooth eventually leading to an abscess. If Root Canal Treatment (RCT) is not performed, the infection will spread and the tooth will need to be extracted.



What does root canal treatment involve?

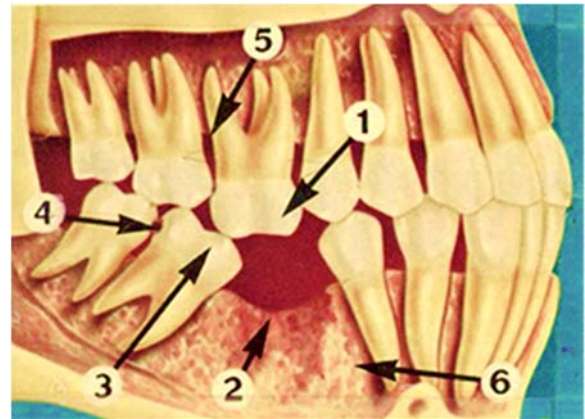
The infected pulp is removed and any infection is drained. The root canals are then cleaned, disinfected and shaped until ready for the permanent root filling. Once the dentist is confident that the infection is gone, the root filling (a rubber material) is compressed into the canals to permanently seal them. A normal filling is then needed on top of the root filling to restore and seal the tooth. Sometimes the treatment will involve two or more long appointments

Does it hurt?

A local anaesthetic is used and the whole procedure should feel little different to that of having a normal filling although the appointment will usually be longer. There will usually be some pain or discomfort for 3-4 days following the treatment which can be managed with over the counter analgesics. The tooth may feel slightly tender and "different" for a few weeks following treatment.

What if I don't have the treatment?

The alternative to RCT is the extraction of the tooth. Once the pulp is damaged, it cannot heal without treatment and it is not recommended to leave an infected tooth in the mouth as it can lead to painful dental abscesses, facial swelling and continued bone loss around the root of the tooth.



Extraction is not without consequence and a gap can lead to:

1. Drifting of opposing teeth affecting your bite
2. Irreversible resorption of the jaw bone
3. Tilting of teeth
4. Cavities as a result of teeth tilting
5. Gum pocketing and localised bone loss
6. Loss in bone density

Typically the cost of replacing an extracted tooth down the track with a plate, bridge or implant may exceed the cost of a root canal.

Replacements to a natural tooth are never as good as what was originally present

What will my tooth look like after treatment?

Sometimes a root treated tooth will darken after treatment. If any discolouration does take place, there are various cosmetic treatments available to restore the natural appearance of the tooth.

What if the infection comes back?

Root canal treatment is usually successful in about 80% of cases, although this depends largely on the difficulty of the individual tooth. If there should be a recurrence of infection the treatment can usually be repeated. If a tooth has a particularly difficult shape, or a complication, it is possible to refer to a specialist who can use advanced techniques and instruments to treat your tooth. Sometimes extraction of the tooth is the only option if treatment fails.

Are there any risks?

- There is a moderate risk of pain and swelling immediately following treatment and for a few days afterwards. This is normally relieved by over-the-counter painkillers but can occasionally be more severe.
- Sometimes there can be a spreading infection from the tooth, which may need antibiotics.
- Root-canal instruments are very fragile. Although uncommon, there is a possibility that one may break inside the tooth.
- The root filling may sometimes extend beyond the tip of the root, or may not completely fill the root to the tip.
- The tooth may be “perforated” (this is when a hole is made through the side of the tooth when searching for small canals)

Any of these complications may compromise the prognosis for the tooth and delay or prevent healing. In some cases a serious complication may necessitate extraction of the tooth or referral to a specialist.

Will the tooth be safe after treatment?

Root filled teeth are weaker and more brittle than live teeth and the greatest reason for failure is fracture of the tooth. For this reason it is often advisable to restore the root-filled tooth with a filling that covers the entire tooth or ideally a porcelain crown to reinforce the tooth. We normally wait a few months after treatment so that we can be sure that the root canal treatment is OK prior to assessing whether crowning is advisable.

How do I prevent myself from needing root canals in future?

As most tooth aches are due to cavities reaching the nerve or fillings close to the nerve, in order to prevent the need for root canals we advise the following:

- Brush twice a day and floss once a day to prevent the build-up of plaque which cause cavities. Brushing removes the plaque from the surfaces of your teeth while flossing removes plaque from in between them.
- Eating a diet which minimises sugars, avoid soft/sugary drinks and sweets. Also reduce snacking in between meals.

Prevention is always better than the cure!

Please remember that cavities can be present without pain and they generally do not cause any pain until the nerve is involved. Once a toothache occurs, root canal treatment or extractions are the only options available. Always have regular check-ups and have cavities filled as soon as possible; please do not leave them as cavities do not disappear and only get larger with time.

Stages of Root Canal Treatment

