

# Root canal treatment



Your dentist has explained that you need to have root canal treatment. This information sheet is aimed at giving you a little more information to read at your leisure. Your dentist will be able to answer any questions you have. Feel free to use the back of this form to write down any questions or notes.

## What is root canal treatment?

When a tooth has significant decay inside the tooth or has been injured, the nerve of the tooth can die. There are other reasons teeth can die, but once this has happened you're at risk of developing a dental abscess.

To minimise this risk, your dentist needs to remove the dead or infected nerve from within the tooth root. Once the nerve has been removed, the nerve canal is carefully cleaned, prepared and sterilised so that a filling material can be put into the space the nerve once occupied.

In the past, your tooth would have needed to be removed. However, root canal treatment can now help you retain your natural teeth.

## Am I a candidate for root canal treatment?

If the nerve in your tooth has died, you may experience severe pain and swelling. Sometimes, the nerve may die more slowly and you may have few symptoms. If you're unable to bite down on a tooth, have lengthy sensitivity to hot and cold or have a discoloured tooth, this may indicate nerve death.

Your dentist will have assessed your situation carefully to determine whether you're a good candidate for root canal treatment. You will need to provide details of any general health issues you may have and/or medications you're taking. You will have dental x-rays, other tests and a complete dental examination to assess your suitability.

## What does root canal treatment involve?

Root canal treatment is likely to take several appointments to complete, depending on the difficulty of the procedure.

Your dentist will remove the nerve from the tooth and then use a series of instruments to prepare the tooth for the root filling. Your dentist will use x-rays or other instruments to determine the length of each root before and during the treatment. Another x-ray will be taken once treatment is complete.

During treatment, your dentist will use a "rubber dam." This is a sheet of plastic (often latex) that secures to the tooth so that the root isn't contaminated by your saliva and bacteria. You must inform your dentist if you have a latex allergy.

## Can every tooth have root canal treatment?

There is no guarantee that any medical or dental procedure will be successful. However, your dentist will have assessed the rate of success based on your situation. You should ask your dentist to explain this to you before you consent to treatment.

If you look after your teeth and gums, your treated tooth may last a long time. Often your dentist will suggest you have a crown placed on the tooth since root-treated teeth are more brittle and more likely to fracture than non-treated teeth.

Sometimes metal posts are put into the filled canals to help the crown to stay in place.

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## Information

### Are there any risks to the procedure?

Any invasive procedure carries risks, and root canal treatment is no different. Possible risks and complications include:

- If the root canal treatment fails, you may have to have the tooth removed.
- Occasionally, despite the very best of efforts, the root canal can become infected during and/or after treatment. Sometimes, this can happen months or years after the original root canal treatment. If infection recurs, you may need to have the tooth retreated or removed.
- Once the nerve is removed, the tooth will usually slowly discolour. This can be treated in a range of ways and your dentist can explain these options to you.
- The special instruments which are used in root canal treatment are very fine and can occasionally break during treatment. If this happens, your dentist will explain what has happened. Sometimes the fractured instrument can be left in place. On other occasions, it may need to be removed and may require special techniques or referral.
- Your root-treated tooth will become increasingly brittle over time. You should avoid eating hard food on the tooth to minimise the risk of the tooth fracturing.
- Occasionally, the local anaesthetic used in your dental injection can cause irritation to nerves. If this happens, the numbness can last much longer. However, on rare occasions, the numbness can be permanent.

### Do I need to see a specialist?

Your dentist will carefully assess you and will give you the opportunity to consult with a specialist endodontist if you wish.



Infected tooth  
with abscess



Infected tissue is removed  
and canals are cleaned  
and shaped



Canals are filled with a  
permanent material and  
opening sealed with a filling



New crown is cemented  
onto rebuilt tooth