



Root Canal (Endodontic) Treatment

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

- What is root canal treatment?
- What is the dental pulp?
- What happens if the pulp is injured?
- Why does the pulp need to be removed?
- What does the treatment involve?
- How long will the restored tooth last?

What is root canal treatment?

Your dentist uses root canal treatment to find the cause and then treat problems of the tooth's soft core (the dental pulp). Years ago, teeth with diseased or injured pulps were removed. Today, root canal treatment has given dentists a safe way of saving teeth.

What is the dental pulp?

The pulp is the soft tissue that contains nerves, blood vessels and connective tissue. It lies within the tooth and extends from the crown of the tooth to the tip of the root in the bone of the jaws.

What happens if the pulp gets injured?

An abscessed (infected) tooth caused by tooth decay. When the pulp is diseased or injured and can't repair itself, it dies. The most common cause of pulp death is a cracked tooth or a deep cavity. Both of these problems can let germs (bacteria) enter the pulp. Germs can cause an infection inside the tooth. Left without treatment, pus builds up at the root tip, in the jawbone, forming a "pus-pocket" called an abscess. An abscess can cause damage to the bone around the teeth.

Why does the pulp need to be removed?

When the infected pulp is not removed, pain and swelling can result. Certain byproducts of the infection can injure your jaw bones. Without treatment, your tooth may have to be removed.

What does treatment involve?

Treatment often involves from one to three visits. During treatment, your general dentist or endodontist (a dentist who specializes in problems of the pulp) removes the diseased pulp. The pulp chamber and root canal(s) of the tooth are then cleaned and sealed.

Here's how your tooth is saved through treatment:

1. First, an opening is made through the crown of the tooth.
2. An opening is made through the crown of the tooth into the pulp chamber.
3. The pulp is then removed. The root canal(s) is cleaned and shaped to a form that can be filled.
4. The pulp is removed, and the root canals are cleaned, enlarged and shaped.
5. Medications may be put in the pulp chamber and root canal(s) to help get rid of germs and prevent infection.
6. A temporary filling will be placed in the crown opening to protect the tooth between dental visits. Your dentist may leave the tooth open for a few days to drain. You might also be given medicine to help control infection that may have spread beyond the tooth.
7. The pulp chamber and root canals are filled and sealed.
8. The temporary filling is removed and the pulp chamber and root canal(s) are cleaned and filled.
9. In the final step, a gold or porcelain crown is usually placed over the tooth. If an endodontist performs the treatment, he or she will recommend that you return to your family dentist for this final step.
10. The crown of the tooth is then restored.

How long will the restored tooth last?

Your restored tooth could last a lifetime, if you continue to care for your teeth and gums. However, regular checkups are necessary. As long as the root(s) of a treated tooth are nourished by the tissues around it, your tooth will remain healthy.