

ROOT CANAL THERAPY

What is a root canal?

Underneath your tooth's enamel and dentin is an area of soft tissue called the pulp, with nerve tissue, veins, arteries and lymph vessels. Root canals are very small, thin divisions that branch off from the top pulp chamber down to the tip of the root. Every tooth has at least one and sometimes four root canals.

Why do I feel pain?

When the pulp becomes infected due to a deep cavity, a fracture that allows bacteria to seep in, or injury due to trauma from previous dental work or traumatic accidents, it can die. Damaged or dead pulp causes increased blood flow and cellular activity, and pressure that cannot be relieved from inside the tooth. Pain in the tooth is commonly felt when biting down, chewing on it and applying hot or cold foods and drinks. The tooth may have a dull ache, throb, or even bother you at night while sleeping.

Why do I need root canal therapy?

If you have a problem with the tooth's pulp, it will not heal by itself. Without treatment, the infection will spread and bone around the tooth will degenerate. Pain worsens until one is forced to seek emergency care. The alternative is extraction of the tooth, which can cause surrounding teeth to shift crookedly, resulting in a bad bite and unsightly smile. The space left behind will require an implant or a bridge, both of which are more costly than root canal therapy. If you have the choice, it's always best to keep your original tooth.

What is involved in root canal therapy?

Treatment usually involves one appointment. If the case is very complex we will refer you to an endodontist (a nerve specialist). First we will completely numb the area. We will remove the disease tissue, then clean, shape and fill the root canal to prevent recontamination. If the treatment takes more than one visit, a temporary filling is placed. If the tooth has structural problems, a post may be placed to increase the retention of filling material. After the area has been sealed, a crown is placed to prevent tooth loss from stress fracture and to improve esthetics.

What are the risks and complications?

More than 95% of root canal treatments are successful. Sometimes a tooth needs to be re-cleaned due to diseased canal offshoots that were difficult to detect or due to the fracturing of a cleaning instrument-both of which are rare occurrences. Occasionally, a root canal therapy will fail altogether, marked by a return of pain and the root canal will need to be re-cleaned. Retreatment may also involve cleaning and sealing the tooth from the root tip via what is called an apical surgery. This treatment can often times be performed in our office as well. In more rare instances, some teeth may still require removal.

What happens after treatment? Root Canal Treatment Post-Operative Instructions

Because cleaning the root canals may cause inflammation of the tissue surrounding the tooth, you may have discomfort for a few days. Advil (ibuprofen) should be taken regularly for the first 24 hours and as needed following that. We usually prescribe a stronger pain medication that you may not need to have filled. It is not unusual for a root canal treated tooth to continue to feel not necessarily painful but "different" for several months following treatment during healing. Eventually, this sensation will go away. After your treatment, brush and floss regularly. Avoid chewing hard foods directly on the treated tooth until a crown is placed to prevent potential tooth fracture.