

Root canal treatment

Q1. What is a root canal treatment?

A1. Root canal treatment, also known as endodontics, is the treatment of an infected tooth which involves having a filling placed in the root.

Q2. Why do I need root canal treatment?

A2. Inside the tooth is the pulp containing the nerve and blood supply. Sometimes it can become infected due to decay (caries) or trauma (injury). Then the tooth slowly becomes sensitive to hot and cold and is tender to bite on. The pain gets worse if the tooth is not treated.

If you have an infection inside the pulp of your tooth it is likely to spread around your tooth and develop into an abscess which can cause a lot of pain and discomfort. An abscess is a pus formation inside the bone around the root. That swelling causes pressure and pain and sometimes it can work itself out through the bone and gums and a fistula opening (sinus) is formed in the gum close to the root.

Root canal treatment prevents the infection from spreading, any existing fistula or sinus will heal and the tooth can be saved from being extracted.

Q3. What does root canal treatment involve?

A3. To begin with they will remove the infected pulp and clean the root canal from dead and infected tissue inside the tooth. The root canal is then shaped and widened in preparation for the filling. A temporary filling and antiseptic dressing will be placed to protect your tooth and disinfect and kill any remaining bacteria inside the tooth in between your appointments. At the next appointment they will ensure the infection has cleared and then replace the temporary filling with a permanent one called gutta-percha which is a rubber material.

Q4. How long does the treatment take?

A4. You generally need 2 appointments for root canal treatment. If the tooth has been infected for a long time it might be needed 3-4 sessions of treatment. Depending on which tooth (the size of the tooth) is being treated the appointments will take from 20 - 45 minutes each session.

Q5. Am I likely to have problems with it in the future?

A5. You can eat and drink as normal with a root filled tooth however it will be more brittle. As such, it may be necessary to have a crown made to provide extra support.

Q6. How long will a rootfilled tooth last?

A6. A successful rootfilling can make the tooth last many years to a lifetime. As with any other tooth it will still be susceptible to cavities so it is important to brush frequently and have regular dental check-ups.

Q7. Is root canal treatment always successful?

A7. Unfortunately root canal treatment is never guaranteed to save your tooth. If the tooth never has been rootfilled before, the root canal treatment is usually very successful. However if the infection reoccurs then it is possible to reattempt the treatment.

If the tooth has been infected with an abscess over long period of time and caused a lot of bone loss, it is more difficult to cure and save the tooth. Therefore the earlier the infection is treated the better prognosis.

Q8. Is it painful to have this treatment?

A8. No, just like a normal filling, you will be given a local anaesthetic to numb your mouth prior to the treatment. On the second treatment you don't usually need local anaesthetic as the nerve in the tooth is already removed.

Q9. Will the treatment affect the appearance of the tooth?

A9. A rootfilled tooth can become dark and discoloured after treatment if there has been left infected tissue behind. However there are different whitening techniques available to make the tooth regain its natural colour.

Q10. Is there an alternative treatment?

A10. If you choose not to have root canal treatment then the infection will remain in your tooth and it would therefore require an extraction.