

What is root canal treatment?

Root canal treatment (also called endodontics) is needed when the blood or nerve supply to the tooth (known as the pulp) is infected through decay or injury. You may not feel any pain in the early stages of the infection. In some cases, your tooth could darken in colour which may mean that the nerve of the tooth has died or is dying. This would need root canal treatment.

Why is root canal treatment needed?

If the pulp becomes infected, the infection may spread through the root canal system of the tooth. This may eventually lead to an abscess. An abscess is an inflamed area in which pus collects and can cause swelling of the tissues around the tooth. The symptoms of an abscess can range from a dull ache to severe pain and the tooth may be tender when you bite. If root canal treatment (RCT) is not carried out, the infection will spread and the tooth may need to be taken out.

Will it hurt?

No. Usually, a local anaesthetic is used and it should feel no different to having an ordinary filling done.

What does it involve?

The aim of the treatment is to remove all the infection from the root canal. The root is then cleaned and filled to prevent any further infection.

Root canal treatment is a skilled and time-consuming procedure. Most courses of treatment will involve two or more visits to your dentist.

At the first appointment, the infected pulp is removed. Any abscesses, which may be present, can also be drained at this time. The root canal is then cleaned and shaped ready for the filling. A temporary filling is put in and the tooth is left to settle.

The tooth is checked at a later visit and when all the infection has cleared, the tooth is permanently filled.

What will my tooth look like after treatment?

In the past, a root filled tooth would often darken after treatment. However, with modern techniques this does not usually happen. If there is any discolouration, there are several treatments available to restore the natural appearance.

What if an infection happens again?

Root canal treatment is usually very successful. However, if the infection comes back the treatment can be repeated.

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What if I don't have root canal treatment?

The alternative is to have the tooth out. Once the pulp is destroyed, it can't heal and it is not recommended to leave an infected tooth in the mouth.

Although some people would prefer an extraction to root canal treatment, it is usually best to keep as many natural teeth as possible.

Will the tooth be safe after treatment?

Yes. However, as a dead tooth is more brittle, it may be necessary to restore the tooth with a crown to provide extra support and strength to the tooth.

Where can this treatment be carried out?

Root canal treatment is a routine dental procedure, which your dentist will be happy for you to do. However, sometimes your dentist may refer you to an Endodontist who is a specialist in this type of treatment.

What about aftercare?

Root-treated teeth should be treated just the same as any other tooth. Remember to clean your teeth for at least two minutes, at least twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste. Cut down on sugary food and drinks, and keep them to mealtimes if possible. See your dentist regularly, as often as they recommend.

