

Root Canal Treatment



Inside a tooth is a fine space called the root canal. The root canal contains the dental pulp which consists of nerves and blood vessels. If the dental pulp becomes diseased or dies a toothache or an abscess may occur. In the past these problem teeth were extracted but now your dentist can offer you root canal treatment to care for these teeth.

Why is root canal treatment necessary?

Root canal treatment is most often needed for the relief of pain. A number of conditions can lead to irreversible damage of the dental pulp.

- Decay
- Deep fillings
- Trauma
- Tooth fracture
- Infection

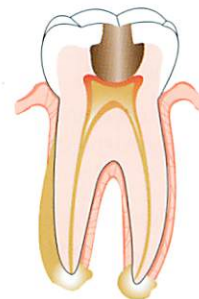
Sometimes there is no apparent cause.

What happens during root canal treatment?

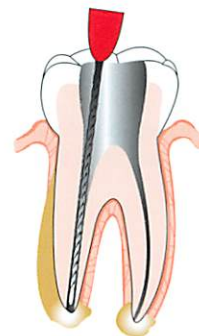
1. An examination with x-rays and special tests to assess the health of the dental pulp and surrounding tissues. Sometimes it is quite difficult to identify which tooth is the cause of pain.
2. Usually a latex sheet called a rubber dam is placed around the tooth to isolate it from the mouth.
3. Access to the root canals is gained by drilling a hole through the top of the tooth.
4. The root canal is measured for length and then cleaned and shaped with fine dental files. The root canals are also washed with sterilising solution.
5. The root canals are then sealed near to their tip with a permanent filling.
6. The tooth is then restored back into useful function.



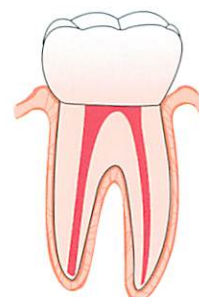
Healthy tooth



Tooth with dental abscess



File in place to clean and shape root canal



Root canal treatment completed and tooth crowned



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Is root canal treatment painful?

Local anaesthetic and modern painkillers are used to provide comfortable treatment. Usually painful symptoms improve once treatment is started.

How is a tooth restored during root canal treatment?

It is very important that any restoration adequately seals the root filling from infection by bacteria from the mouth.

Teeth requiring root canal treatment often have large fillings or extensive damage and will require a crown to restore them properly. These teeth are also weaker and the added protection of a crown is recommended.

How successful is root canal treatment?

If the root canals are able to be fully cleaned and sealed and the tooth properly restored then treatment has a very high success rate.

The treatment may take several visits to complete with temporary fillings and dressings placed in the tooth between visits.

Antibiotics are sometimes prescribed when an infection is present.

What complications can occur during root canal treatment?

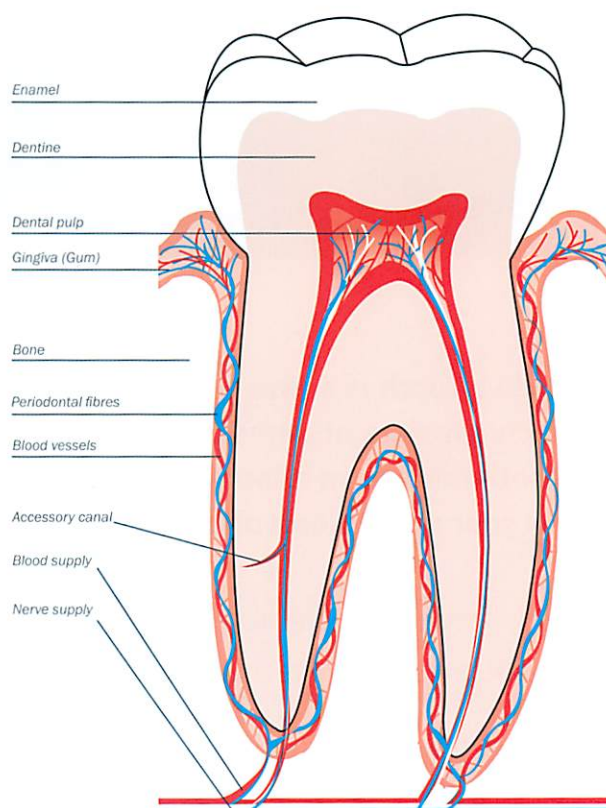
Because the root canals are very fine and curved in some teeth, it may be difficult to clean the canals completely. Occasionally a piece of a file may break off in the root canal due to the strain placed on these fine instruments. Sometimes these are retrievable but they may also be sealed in the root canal as part of the filling.

Pain or discomfort may occur between appointments due to ongoing tenderness of the tissues around the tooth, or a flare-up of an abscess, or a hair-line crack in the root.

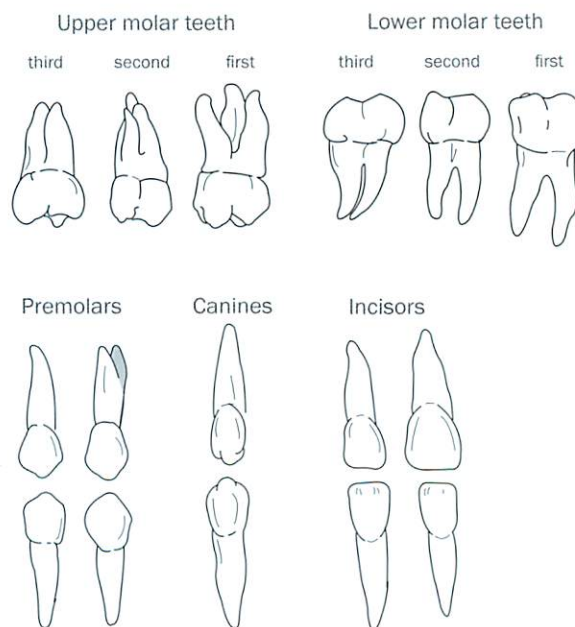
An abscess or ongoing pain will rarely persist following root canal treatment. If this occurs the tooth will require some further treatment. Occasionally a surgical procedure may be required if discomfort persists.

What is the cost?

Your dentist will be able to give you an estimate after a thorough examination. The cost will depend on the difficulty and the time spent treating the tooth.



The healthy tooth



Roots of teeth vary in number, size and shape.



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To find out which option is best for you, and the costs involved, talk to your dentist.