

ROOT CANAL

What is a root canal treatment?

A root canal treatment is a procedure that removes the infected pulp tissue (nerves and blood vessels) from the inner canals of the tooth. Once bacteria have made it inside the canals of the tooth, a root canal treatment is the only way to disinfect the tooth and keep it in your mouth. If you do not wish to have a root canal treatment, you can have the tooth removed instead. A root canal treatment is a special procedure and can take more than one appointment to complete.

A root canal treatment does not make your tooth invincible – it is possible to get new decay on this tooth and it is possible to break this tooth. This procedure does not ensure that you will never need treatment on it again. You should take special care of this tooth in order to preserve it for a long time.

What to expect during the appointment?

During the root canal procedure, you will first be given a numbing agent (local anesthetic). Then you will have a thin plastic barrier put around the tooth (rubber dam) to keep the tooth isolated from saliva. The dentist will then clean the infected pulp tissue from the tooth and shape the canals where the pulpal tissue was. If the tooth is very infected, the dentist will place medication inside of the tooth and ask you to come back at a later date to finish the treatment. After the tooth is sufficiently cleaned and disinfected, your dentist will fill the canals with a special material and seal the tooth.

The dentist may place a temporary filling to cover the hole in the tooth until you have a more definitive restoration placed. It is important that the tooth opening stays covered, so if the temporary filling falls out, please call us. However, if the filling wears away and you feel a divot, that is common and is not a reason to worry. You will likely need a crown on your root canal-treated tooth in order to prevent re-infection and cracks.

What to expect after the appointment?

A root canal treatment helps to treat infection and pain in a tooth. However, it is common to have some discomfort for a few days after you had a root canal. The amount of discomfort you may experience after the root canal treatment is best predicted by the amount of discomfort you had before. You may have a dull ache for a few days after the procedure – this is normal and is not a cause for alarm. Your jaw may also be tender from staying open during the procedure. Take the pain medication recommended by your

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dentist to help with any discomfort. If your dentist prescribed you antibiotics, please take them as directed. Not all patients need antibiotics after a root canal.

Rarely (in less than 5% of cases) patients experience a flare up after the root canal. This usually occurs in teeth that were extremely infected or inflamed prior to the procedure. If you experience a flare up, you may have moderate/severe pain, swelling, throbbing, and general discomfort. If you are experiencing a flare up, please call our office – we may need to prescribe you additional medications. Additionally, contact our clinic with any possible allergic reactions, new symptoms or an uneven bite.

You can start eating once the numbness wears off. Be careful chewing and avoid chewing on the tooth until your permanent restoration has been placed. Avoid eating any hard, crunchy or sticky foods, like pretzels, nuts, hard candy, or taffy.

You should brush and floss your teeth, including the tooth that was treated, unless otherwise instructed by your dentist.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call us at (215) 525-3046.