



ROOT CANAL TREATMENT - ENDODONTICS

A root canal treatment is a dental procedure that treats pain and swelling caused by an abscess, an infection within the tooth and/or the bone around the roots of the tooth. Root canal treatments repair and save your tooth instead of removing it.

If your dentist recommends a root canal treatment, you may have a severely damaged, decaying tooth or an abscess deep within your tooth's pulp, the soft tissue that contains nerves and blood vessels and provides nourishment for your tooth. Abscesses can occur if you have:

- A deep cavity
- Repeated dental procedures that disturb this tissue
- A cracked or fractured tooth
- Injury to the tooth (even if there is not a visible crack or chip)

If you have an abscess and delay seeing the dentist, the pain and swelling will likely grow until it is treated. You are also at risk of losing your tooth because bacteria can damage the bone that keeps your tooth connected to your jaw. Your dentist will need to schedule a follow-up appointment or refer you to an endodontist, a dentist who specializes in teeth's pulp and tissues.

What is involved in a root canal treatment?

A root canal treatment usually takes one or two office visits to complete. Beforehand, your dentist will:

- Take x-rays for a clear view of your tooth and the surrounding bone.
- Numb the area around and including your tooth, using local anesthesia so there is little or no pain.
- Place a thin sheet of latex rubber over your tooth to keep it dry, clean, and protected from viruses, bacteria, and fungi.



During a root canal treatment, your dentist will:

- Create an opening in the top of your tooth.
- Remove the nerve from the tooth and the root canal.
- Clean inside the tooth and each root canal. Your dentist may treat the tooth with germ-killing medicine.
- Fill the root canals with a rubber-like material called gutta-percha (GP) to seal them against future infection. GP is the most widely used root canal filling material because of its low toxicity.¹
- Protect the tooth with a temporary filling until a permanent filling or crown can be placed.

After root canal treatment, your tooth and its surrounding area may feel sensitive for a few days. Your dentist can suggest ways to relieve discomfort. If prescribed, take antibiotics to prevent infection. Tell your dentist if you have any problems taking it.

A follow-up visit will be scheduled as soon as possible to replace the temporary filling with a regular filling or a crown that protects the tooth from further damage. A metal or plastic post may be placed in the root canal. This helps support a crown if you need one.

Restored teeth can last a lifetime

Your restored tooth can last a lifetime with good oral hygiene. Brush twice a day for two minutes with fluoride toothpaste. Also clean between your teeth once a day using floss or floss picks. See your dentist at least twice yearly for dental cleanings.²

For more information

For more information, contact the Division of Public Health, Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services, at 302-622-4540 and www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/ohphome.html.

Resources

1. Pascon EA, Spångberg LS. In vitro cytotoxicity of root canal filling materials: 1. Gutta-percha. *J Endod*. 1990;16(9):429-433. doi:10.1016/s0099-2399(06)81885-6
2. American Dental Association. 2020. *Root Canals: FAQ's About Treatment That Can Save Your Tooth*. In Mouth Healthy. Retrieved July 17, 2020 from <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/r/root-canals>