Common Procedures

Root canals

Also known as: Root canal treatment • Endodontic treatment • Endodontic therapy

Get to the root of it

A root canal is a procedure to remove infected pulp from the inside of the tooth.

Did you know?

An endodontist is a dentist who specializes in root canals and other treatments of the tooth pulp. Both endodontists and general dentists perform root canals, so you can choose whoever you feel most comfortable with.

Teeth contain soft living tissue, which can cause serious pain if infected. By treating the tooth with this procedure, your dentist can stop the decay and save the tooth.

Do I need a root canal?

Pulp can become infected through tooth decay, extensive dental work on the tooth, an imperfect crown or filling, or a crack or chip in the tooth. You may notice these signs if your tooth pulp is infected:

- Toothache
- Sensitivity to hot and cold
- Swelling and tenderness in nearby gums

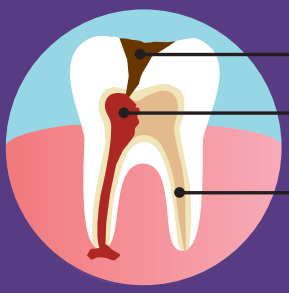
Always talk to your dentist about any tooth discomfort. Your dentist can examine the problem area and take x-rays to get a look inside your tooth.

What if I just leave it?

The bacteria from your infected tooth pulp can spread, causing swelling, pain and bone loss. And if you ignore the decay too long, your dentist may have to pull the tooth.

What happens during the procedure?

1. Your tooth and the surrounding area are numbed with anesthesia.
2. The dentist drills a hole to access the source of decay.
3. Using a long cleaning file, the dentist removes the pulp, bacteria and decayed nerve tissue. He or she scrubs the sides of the canal, using water or sodium hypochlorite to wash away the debris.
4. Almost done! The tooth is sealed, using a temporary or permanent filling. The dentist may choose a temporary filling if he or she wants to apply medication inside the tooth or check the tooth's recovery after several days. When the tooth is ready for a permanent filling, the dentist places a mixture called gutta-percha in the root canal and fills the access hole with resin or amalgam.
5. Finally, you might need follow-up appointments to place a crown or other restoration. Such restoration can protect a tooth weakened by decay and treatment.





Removal of pulp, bacteria and decayed tissue



Root canals filled with gutta-percha



Tooth sealed using a filling

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