

Root Canals: FAQs About Treatment That Can Save Your Tooth

If you have a severely damaged, decaying tooth or a serious tooth infection ([abscess](#)), your dentist may recommend a root canal treatment. Root canals are used to repair and save your tooth instead of removing it.

What's Involved in Root Canal Repair?

The pulp is soft tissue inside your tooth that contains nerves, blood vessels and provides nourishment for your tooth. It can become infected 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's not a visible crack or chip)

If untreated, the tissues around the root of your tooth can become infected. When this happens, you will often feel pain and swelling and an abscess may form inside the tooth and/or in the bone around the end of the root of the tooth. An infection can also put you at risk of losing your tooth completely because bacteria can damage the bone that keeps your tooth connected to your jaw.

Can I Get This Treatment Done During My Regular Check-up Visit?

Your dentist will need to schedule a follow up appointment, or you may be referred to a dentist who specializes in the pulp and tissues surrounding the teeth. This specialist is known as an endodontist.

What Should I Expect?

A root canal treatment usually takes 1 or 2 office visits to complete. There is little to no pain because your dentist will use local anesthesia so you don't feel the procedure. Once the procedure is complete, you should no longer feel the pain you felt before having it done.

Before treatment begins, your dentist will:

- Take X-rays to get a clear view of your tooth and the surrounding bone.
- Numb the area around and including your tooth so you are comfortable during the treatment.
- Put a thin sheet of latex rubber over your tooth to keep it dry, clean and protected from viruses, bacteria and fungus that are normally in the mouth.

During treatment, your dentist will:

- Create an opening in the top of your tooth.
- Remove the tooth's nerve from inside the tooth and in the areas in the root, known 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 to seal them against future infection.
- Place a temporary filling on the tooth to protect it until a definitive restoration like a permanent filling or crown can be placed at the earliest opportunity.

h After root canal treatment:

- Your tooth and the area around it may feel sensitive for a few days. You can talk with your dentist about how to relieve any discomfort you may have.
- Your dentist may prescribe antibiotics if the infection spread. Use as directed, and follow up with your dentist if you have any problems taking it.

You will need a follow-up visit after the root canal treatment. At this visit, your dentist will remove the temporary filling on the tooth and replace it with a regular filling or a crown to protect your tooth from further damage. A metal or plastic post may also be placed in the root canal to help make sure the filling materials remain in place. This helps support a crown if you need one.

How Long Will a Root Canal Filling Last?

With proper care, your restored tooth can last a lifetime. Make it a point to brush twice a day for two minutes with fluoride toothpaste, clean between your teeth once a day and see your dentist regularly to make sure your teeth are strong and healthy.