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ROOT CANAL TREATMENT

WHAT IS A ROOT CANAL TREATMENT?

Root Canal Treatment (otherwise known as 'endodontic' treatment) is needed when the blood or nerve supply to the tooth or pulp is infected through decay or injury. It is most often needed in teeth that have very large or deep fillings, or in teeth which have encountered trauma. The following are some commonly asked questions:

WHY IS A ROOT CANAL TREATMENT NEEDED?

If the pulp becomes infected, the infection spreads through the root canal system of the tooth which may eventually lead to abscess (an infection at the end of the root). This can be caused by:

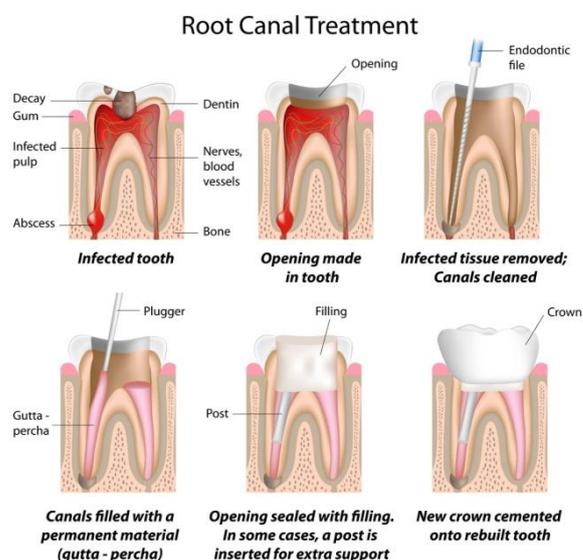
- Repeated dental work to the tooth
- Breakdown of a filling or crown
- A deep cavity
- Trauma
- A crack or chip in the tooth
- Extreme wear

To improve the chances of success, root canal treatment should start as soon as possible. All root canals in the affected tooth must be treated. Severe pain and abscesses can occur if the pulp of the tooth is not treated quickly. If the abscess is left untreated, infection can damage the bone surrounding the root. If the tooth does not have endodontic treatment, it will have to be removed.

DOES ROOT CANAL TREATMENT HURT?

No. A local anaesthetic is generally used and the procedure feels no different to having a normal filling done.

WHAT DOES THE TREATMENT INVOLVE?



The aim of treatment is to remove all infection and debris from the root canal. The tooth is firstly opened through the top surface where the root canals are accessed by a needle-like instrument called a file, and the infected dead nerve is removed. The inside of the tooth is then disinfected with a strong antiseptic solution.

The inside of the root is then cleaned and filed smooth to prevent any future infection. Depending on the severity of the infection and the complexity of the root canal system, this process can be quite time-consuming.

Once the canals are sterile, they are then dried and filled with a rubber-based material which is heated and compressed into the root canals to permanently seal it.

WHAT IF THE INFECTION RETURNS?

With a success rate of approximately 90%, root canal treatment is one of the most reliable dental procedure and complications are rare. However, there is a risk of recurrent infection which may require treatment by a specialist endodontist. In occasional cases when a root canal treatment has failed, the only option remaining is to extract the tooth.

WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE TO ROOT CANAL TREATMENT?

The only alternative to root canal treatment is to have the tooth extracted. Once the pulp is damaged, it cannot heal without the treatment and it is not recommended to leave an infected tooth in the mouth.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS INVOLVED?

There is a moderate risk of pain and swelling immediately following treatment for a few days afterwards. This is normally easily controlled by over-the-counter painkillers but can occasionally be more severe.

As with any surgery there are risks associated with root canal treatment.

- An inability to completely fill the root canal because the canal is calcified or has a unique root curvature.
- Chronic infection may occur or may continue, even after repeated attempts to sterilise the root.
- Due to the reduced strength of a non-vital tooth, fracture or breakage of the root or crown portion during or after the treatment.
- Inadvertent breakage of files or instrument tips within the canal system that is unable to be retrieved.

In some cases complications may necessitate extraction of the tooth or referral to a specialist endodontist.

WILL THE TOOTH BE SAFE AFTER TREATMENT?

Root-filled teeth are weaker and more brittle than vital teeth, for this reason it is highly recommended to restore the root-filled tooth with a crown to provide artificial strength. It is sometimes advisable to wait a few months prior to crowning to ensure the tooth is symptomless. A root-filled tooth can be filled with composite resin material but this will not provide the strength that a root-filled tooth will require long term.

WHAT ABOUT AFTER CARE?

A root-filled tooth should be treated the same as any other tooth. However, it is advisable to remember that a non-crowned root-filled tooth is not as strong as a natural tooth.

The information presented on this leaflet is only a summary of root canal treatment and should therefore be used only as a guide. It does not replace personal discussion with your dentist. Should you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact us for advice. Please call us on 9840 2963.