

# Root canal treatment

Root canal treatment (also called endodontics) is needed when the blood or nerve supply of the tooth (known as the pulp) is infected through **decay** or **injury**. You may not feel any pain in the early stages of the infection. In some cases, your tooth could darken in colour, which may mean that the nerve of the tooth has died (or is dying). This would need root canal treatment.

If the pulp becomes infected, the infection may spread through the root canal system of the tooth. This may eventually lead to an abscess (gumboil). An abscess is an inflamed area in which pus collects and can cause swelling of the tissues around the tooth. The symptoms of an abscess can range from a dull ache to severe pain and the tooth may be tender when you bite. If root canal treatment is not carried out, the infection will spread and the tooth may need to be taken out.

## Does it hurt?

No. Usually, a local anaesthetic is used and it should feel no different to having an ordinary filling done. There may be some tenderness afterwards but this should gradually get less over time.

The aim of the treatment is to remove all infection from the root canal. The root is then cleaned and filled to prevent any further infection.

- Fine instruments are used to clean out the inside of the tooth. Strong solutions are used to wash out and disinfect the inside of the tooth, eliminating as much of the infection as possible.
- The inside of the tooth is dried with sterile points.
- The root canal system is then filled with an inert material and a filling placed over the top.
- At the first appointment, the infected pulp is removed, and any abscesses can be drained. The root canal is then cleaned and shaped ready for the filling. A temporary filling is put in and the tooth is left to settle.
- The tooth is checked at a later visit and when all the infection has cleared, the tooth is permanently filled.



## What will my tooth look like after treatment?

In the past, a root-filled tooth would often darken after treatment. However, with modern techniques this does not usually happen. If there is any discolouration, there are several treatments available to restore the natural appearance.

## What if it happens again?

Root canal treatment is usually very successful. However, if the infection comes back, the treatment can sometimes be repeated. You may also choose to have the tooth removed.

## What if I don't have the treatment?

The alternative is to have the tooth out. Once the pulp is destroyed it can't heal, and it is not recommended to leave an infected tooth in the mouth.

## Will the tooth be safe after treatment?

Yes. However, as a dead tooth is more brittle, it may be necessary to restore the tooth with a **crown** to provide extra support and strength to the tooth.

## What about aftercare?

Root-treated teeth should be treated just the same as any other tooth. Remember to clean your teeth for two minutes, twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Cut down on sugary foods and drinks, and keep them only to mealtimes if possible.

See your dentist as often as they recommend for **regular check-ups** and routine maintenance scale and polish appointments.