



ROOT CANAL THERAPY

Insight to the importance and procedures of Root Canal Treatment.

The dental pulp is a soft tissue that contains tissue arteries, veins, and lymph vessels. It lies within the hard dentin in a place called the pulp chamber. The pulp extends from the tip of the root (where it connects to the jaw) through the center of the root to the crown. When the pulp is diseased or injured and cannot repair itself it dies.

The most common reason a tooth needs root canal treatment is due to a fracture of the tooth or deeply penetrating decay or a cavity. Bacteria in the saliva can then reach the pulp, causing infection that spreads to the tissues surrounding and supporting the tooth in the jaw. This is called a dental abscess.

A blow to a tooth can damage the nerve and blood vessels of the pulp so severely that it dies. Periodontal (gum) disease, if unchecked, also can affect the pulp; both root canal (endodontic) and periodontal (gum) therapy are needed for this condition.

If a damaged or diseased pulp is not removed, the tooth and its surrounding tissues become infected. Pain and swelling may accompany the infection and the tooth may be very sore. Even if pain is absent the infection can injure the supporting bone. Without treatment the tooth will eventually have to be extracted.

Root canal treatment is usually accomplished in one to three appointments. Endodontic treatment requires a precise and exacting technique and occasionally circumstances may indicate the necessity for additional visits. First, an opening is made through the crown of the tooth into the pulp chamber. Then the pulp is carefully removed and the root canal or canals cleaned and enlarged so they can be filled. Medication may be put in the pulp chamber to help eliminate bacteria and then a temporary filling is placed. If severe infection is present, the tooth may be left open for a few days so drainage can take place and the patient may be given antibiotics.

During subsequent appointments, if needed, the root canal is filled and sealed with a material that prevents bacteria from re-entering the canal. Finally, the crown of the tooth is restored. A crown made with gold, porcelain or combination of gold alloy and porcelain is used to restore the tooth when the tooth has been badly fractured or decayed.

A tooth will not be treated unless there is a reasonably good chance of success. While there is no certainty concerning healing, we expect healing to occur in approximately 90% to 95% of cases. During the root canal therapy period and until the tooth has been restored with a crown we ask our patients not to chew with the tooth. The reason for this request is to prevent the possibility of the tooth fracturing which may result in bone surgery or the extraction of the fractured tooth.

The type of material used for restoration will depend on the amount of natural tooth remaining its function and location. Patients sometimes ask why the tooth couldn't just be extracted. One reason is that when a tooth is removed and not replaced, the teeth surrounding the empty space begin to move in. This creates more problems and could result in the loss of more teeth. Chewing and biting efficiency will suffer and the facial appearance may be affected.

A replacement bridge or implant could be made to replace the lost tooth but cost of a bridge or implant is usually greater than that of root canal treatment. Endodontic treatment is obviously preferable!

A healthy natural tooth is always better than an artificial one. Root canal therapy is one option dentists use to help you keep a tooth that would otherwise have to be removed. An endodontically-restored tooth can last many years if it receives proper care. The gums and bone that surround the tooth must be kept healthy. And the rules are the same when we talk about dental health:

- *Brush and Floss your teeth daily
- *Eat balanced meals and cut down on sugary foods
- *Avoid sweet snacks
- *Have regular dental appointments

Please feel free to call the office if you have any further questions.