

# FAQs About Root Canal Treatment

*American Association of Endodontists*

<http://www.aae.org/rootcanals.html>

Nothing is as good as a natural tooth! And sometimes your natural tooth may need root canal (endodontic) treatment for it to remain a healthy part of your mouth.

Most patients report that having root canal (endodontic) treatment today is as unremarkable as having a cavity filled.

If you've been told you need root canal (endodontic) treatment, you can find the answers to your questions below.

## ***Who performs endodontic treatment ?***

All dentists, including your general dentist, receive basic training in endodontic treatment in dental school. General dentists often refer patients needing endodontic treatment to endodontists.

## ***Who is an "endodontist" ?***

An endodontist is a dentist with special training in diagnosing and treating problems associated with the inside of the tooth. They do only endodontic procedures in their practices because they are specialists. To become specialists, they complete dental school and an additional two or more years of advanced training in endodontics, one of the nine specialties recognized by the American Dental Association. They perform routine as well as difficult and very complex endodontic procedures, including retreatment of previous root canals that have not healed completely, as well as endodontic surgery. Endodontists are also experienced at finding the cause of oral and facial pain that has been difficult to diagnose.

## ***Why would I need an endodontic procedure ?***

Endodontic treatment is necessary when the pulp, the soft tissue inside the root canal, becomes inflamed or infected. The inflammation or infection can have a variety of causes: deep decay, repeated dental procedures on the tooth, or a crack or chip in the tooth. In addition, an injury to a tooth may cause pulp damage even if the tooth has no visible chips or cracks. If pulp inflammation or infection is left untreated, it can cause pain or lead to an abscess.



### ***What are the signs of needing endodontic treatment ?***

Signs to look for include pain, prolonged sensitivity to heat or cold, tenderness to touch and chewing, discoloration of the tooth, and swelling, drainage and tenderness in the lymph nodes as well as nearby bone and gingival tissues. Sometimes, however, there are no symptoms.

### ***How does endodontic treatment save the tooth ?***

The endodontist removes the inflamed or infected pulp, carefully cleans and shapes the inside of the canal, a channel inside the root, then fills and seals the space. Afterwards, you will return to your dentist, who will place a crown or other restoration on the tooth to protect and restore it to full function. After restoration, the tooth continues to function like any other tooth.

### ***Will I feel pain during or after the procedure ?***

Many endodontic procedures are performed to relieve the pain of toothaches caused by pulp inflammation or infection. With modern techniques and anesthetics, most patients report that they are comfortable during the procedure.

For the first few days after treatment, your tooth may feel sensitive, especially if there was pain or infection before the procedure. This discomfort can be relieved with over-the-counter or prescription medications. Follow your endodontist's instructions carefully.

Your tooth may continue to feel slightly different from your other teeth for some time after your endodontic treatment is completed. However, if you have severe pain or pressure or pain that lasts more than a few days, call your endodontist.

### ***How much will the procedure cost ?***

The cost varies depending on how complex the problem is and which tooth is affected. Molars are more difficult to treat, the fee is usually more. Most dental insurance policies provide some coverage for endodontic treatment.

Generally, endodontic treatment and restoration of the natural tooth are less expensive than the alternative of having the tooth extracted. An extracted tooth must be replaced with a bridge or implant to restore chewing function and prevent adjacent teeth from shifting. These procedures tend to cost more than endodontic treatment and appropriate restoration. With root canal treatment you save your natural teeth and money.

### ***Will the tooth need any special care or additional treatment after endodontic treatment ?***

You should not chew or bite on the treated tooth until you have had it restored by your dentist. The unrestored tooth is susceptible to fracture, so you should see your dentist for a full

restoration as soon as possible. Otherwise, you need only practice good oral hygiene, including brushing, flossing, and regular checkups and cleanings.

Most endodontically treated teeth last as long as other natural teeth. In a few cases, a tooth that has undergone endodontic treatment does not heal or the pain continues. Occasionally, the tooth may become painful or diseased months or even years after successful treatment. Often when this occurs, redoing the endodontic procedure can save the tooth.

### ***What causes an endodontically treated tooth to need additional treatment ?***

New trauma, deep decay, or a loose, cracked or broken filling can cause new infection in your tooth. In some cases, the endodontist may discover additional very narrow or curved canals that could not be treated during the initial procedure.

### ***Can all teeth be treated endodontically ?***

Most teeth can be treated. Occasionally, a tooth can't be saved because the root canals are not accessible, the root is severely fractured, the tooth doesn't have adequate bone support, or the tooth cannot be restored. However, advances in endodontics are making it possible to save teeth that even a few years ago would have been lost. When endodontic treatment is not effective, endodontic surgery may be able to save the tooth.