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Root Canal Treatment.

Root canal treatment is carried out when the pulp (also called “nerve”) inside a tooth is either inflamed or dead. The pulp may become inflamed or may die if there is significant decay in a tooth, if there is a large restoration (filling or crown) or if the tooth has been subjected to trauma.

The inflamed pulp may cause toothache or remain pain-free. When the pulp dies, the space it inhabits (the root canal) rapidly becomes infected with bacteria. This may cause pain and swelling in the supporting tissues (abscess) or the tooth may remain symptom-free.

The purpose of root canal treatment is to remove the inflamed tissue or bacteria inside the root canal and thus allow the surrounding tissues to heal. After cleaning the root canal system, the space created is filled with a root filling. A rubber material called gutta percha is used as the root filling material along with a cement to provide a good seal.

With the use of modern local anaesthetic techniques root canal treatment can be performed with little or no discomfort. It is normal for patients to experience some soreness after treatment, as the supporting tissues of the tooth may be a little bruised. In some cases (5-10%), where there is an existing infection in the jawbone around the root, the treatment can result in an acute flare-up of the infection. If this happens antibiotics will be prescribed to help control the infection.

The root canal system, especially in molars, is often complex and difficult to clean completely. Root canals are often complex structures and may be very small, even invisible to the naked eye. It is not uncommon to find four or five canals in a molar tooth, the smallest of these often being less than .05 mm in diameter. This is why many general dentists prefer to refer these cases to a specialist.

The duration of root canal treatment will depend on the complexity and number of canals in the tooth. Root canal treatment on a molar tooth will normally take from ninety minutes to three hours. Some complicated cases may take even longer.

Between visits anti-bacterial medicaments are placed inside the canals to kill any remaining bacteria. This dressing is usually in place for a period of one week, during which the tooth is sealed with a temporary filling.

It is normal for teeth to be slightly tender and sore for a few days after root canal treatment. Some teeth, particularly ones that have been problematic for a while, may take a few months to settle completely. The success rate of first time root canal treatments is over 90%, while the success rate is reduced to about 80% when an existing root treatment needs redoing if it has failed.

Once the root-treated tooth has settled down completely a crown should be placed to protect the remaining tooth structure from fracture.