



This information sheet answers frequently asked questions about root canal treatment. It has been developed to be used in discussion with your dental practitioner.

## 1. What is root canal treatment?

The root canal system of the tooth extends from the crown (top of the tooth) to the end of the root (bottom of the tooth) and contains the pulp. Pulp is the soft tissue at the centre of the tooth. Root canal treatment, which is sometimes referred to as a 'root canal', is the removal of infected or inflamed pulp.

## 2. When is root canal treatment needed?

You may have visited the dental practitioner if you had symptoms of a pulp infection such as:

- pain when eating or drinking hot or cold food or drink
- pain when biting or chewing
- a loose tooth
- swelling of the gum near the infected tooth
- pus oozing from around the infected tooth
- facial swelling
- the tooth getting darker in colour.

An x-ray of your tooth may show the cause of pain or infection. Antibiotics are not effective in treating root canal infections. The two treatment options are removing the tooth or having a root canal treatment.

## 3. What are the benefits of root canal treatment?

Saving your tooth with a root canal has the benefits of:

- a better bite and more efficient chewing
- keeping your natural teeth
- protecting your other teeth from wear and tear.

## 4. What happens during root canal treatment?

- Your dental practitioner will take x-rays of the tooth and the area around it.
- The tooth area will usually be numbed with a local anaesthetic.
- Your tooth may then be covered with a small rubber sheet that isolates the tooth being treated from the rest of the mouth.
- All tooth decay will be removed.
- The dental practitioner will gain access to the pulp chamber through the top part of the tooth. The pulp will be removed from the crown and roots. The root canals are cleaned and completely filled with a natural latex material.
- The tooth is sealed with a filling or a crown. A crown completely covers the real tooth.
- A root canal may take several hours and/or be completed over several appointments.

## 5. What are the risks and complications of a root canal treatment?

In most cases, root canal treatment is successful and the tooth will no longer cause pain. However, there is always some risk depending on the condition of the tooth, how well you keep your teeth clean, and the biting forces on the tooth.

Common risks and complications include:

- mild temporary pain due to inflammation of the tissues surrounding the tooth
- a darker tooth: there are procedures available which may lighten the tooth if this occurs
- tooth fracture: due to reduced strength and durability of the tooth:
  - a tooth extraction may be required
  - this risk is reduced when a crown is used.

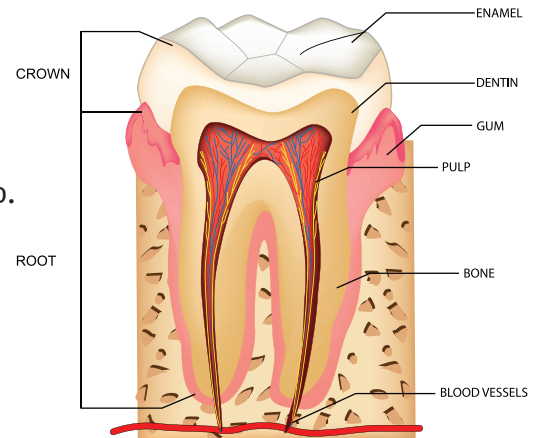


Image 1: Human tooth cross section



## 5. What are the risks and complications of a root canal treatment? (continued)

Uncommon risks and complications include:

- the fine metal files used to clean inside the root canals may break during use and remain in the tooth, and the tooth may need to be removed
  - depending on the size and shape of the roots, there is some risk of creating a hole in the side of a tooth root during the cleaning process
  - severe or persistent pain: return to your treating dental practitioner
  - infection: return to your treating dental practitioner
  - treatment failure: the tooth may require further treatment or extraction if it is unable to be saved
- Death as a result of this procedure is extremely rare.

## 6. What are the risks and complications of a local anaesthetic during a dental procedure?

This procedure will require a local anaesthetic. Refer to the patient information *Local anaesthetic* on the informed consent website: [www.health.qld.gov.au/consent](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/consent)

## 7. Who will be performing my root canal treatment?

Your dental practitioner will perform the root canal treatment.

## 8 Useful sources of information

Read about mouth care for yourself, babies, infants and children, and teenagers, emergencies and accidents, mouthguards, water fluoridation, and available dental services on the Queensland Health Oral Health website: [www.health.qld.gov.au/oralhealth](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/oralhealth)

The Queensland Health Informed Consent website:

[www.health.qld.gov.au/consent](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/consent) has information on various dental procedures.



Image 3: No smoking symbol

To quit smoking:

- talk to your dental practitioner, GP, pharmacist, or community health worker
- call Quitline: 13 QUIT (13 78 48)
- refer to the Queensland Government website:

[www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/atods/smoking/index.html](http://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/atods/smoking/index.html)



Image 2: Website address symbol

## 9. Questions to ask your dental practitioner

Please ask your dental practitioner if you do not understand any aspect of the information in this patient information sheet or any other information you have been given about your condition, treatment options and proposed procedure.

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## 10. Contacts

To find a public local dental clinic, search the Queensland Health Oral Health website “Contact Us” section for a dental service list. The website is:

[www.health.qld.gov.au/oralhealth/contact\\_us.asp](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/oralhealth/contact_us.asp)



Image 4: Ringing phone symbol

A private dental practitioner (who you may need to pay) may be found on the Australian Dental Association website using the “Find a Dentist” tool. The website is: [www.ada.org.au/Find-a-Dentist](http://www.ada.org.au/Find-a-Dentist)

Outside of dental clinic/service hours:

- if advice is required, call 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84). 13HEALTH provides confidential health advice 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- if an emergency, call 000.

Your local contact details are:

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