



Family & Cosmetic Dentistry

by Dr. Mary Jane Hanlon

What do you mean I need a root canal?

Have you ever posed this question to your dentist or to yourself when you are told you need to have a ROOT CANAL? When we hear this most of us conjure up all kinds of terrible scenarios, but the actual root canal procedure is not painful. What is painful is the damaged or dead pulp. A damaged pulp causes increased blood flow, and subsequently increases the fluids which then causes an increase in pressure which is the main reason for the pain you feel! The usual warning signs are an increased sensation to temperature changes, hot more than cold; a sensitivity to pressure when chewing and a noticeable swelling or throbbing.

A root canal is performed to prevent the spreading of infection and the eventual degeneration of the tooth. The dentist or endodontist will give you a local anesthetic to numb the area. A layer of latex or non-latex if you are allergic, called a rubber dam is placed around the tooth to isolate it. The canal is drilled from the crown into the pulp chamber taking out the infected and diseased pulp. The tooth may be left open to drain, temporarily sealed or the canals filled depending on the type of pain. The canal is reshaped and filled with gutta percha, a rubber-like material, to prevent recontamination of the tooth. Once

the tooth is free of all infection, it can be permanently restored with a post and/or crown build-up and a crown. A root canal can take one to three visits. After this is completed, you will return to your dentist to have the tooth prepared for a crown.

Natural inflammation may cause discomfort for a few days, which can be alleviated with over-the-counter medications such as Advil or Tylenol. You'll have a follow-up exam in one year with your endodontist to monitor the healing.

As always, if you notice swelling in your face or neck, or a "pimple" on your gums that doesn't seem to go away, contact your dentist as soon as possible.

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