

Instructions for our Root Canal Patients

Today we have started a root canal for your tooth. The following list contains some important information for you to bear in mind.

First, understand that it is NORMAL for your tooth to be sore and tender, especially to biting, after the anesthetic wears off. The tiny files we use to remove the nerve and pulp tissue from inside the roots are not unlike any other file: they bind to the inside part of the root until it is filed smooth. This binding of the file torques the tooth up and down in the socket and can bruise the ligament which attaches the root of the tooth to the jaw bone. While for most patients this is not a problem, for some patients, especially those with infection and long standing inflammation, this can be the equivalent of the tooth getting hit in arm repeatedly. Like any bruise, the inflammation of this ligament usually resolves in 10-14 days. Please keep this in mind and attempt to chew on the opposite side. Sometimes it is necessary to relieve the biting surface of the tooth to take the pressure off the ligament and allow the bruising to heal.

Remember to use caution when chewing to avoid biting your lip or cheek since we may have used a long-acting anesthetic (up to 12 hours in duration) to keep your tooth comfortable.

We will usually prescribe for you pain medications and antibiotics if there is infection present. Do no delay in obtaining your medications or to take them as prescribed. Starting a root canal in the presence of infection can sometimes make the infection worse before it starts to get better: this is the kind of thing which gives root canals a bad name. It is difficult for the antibiotics to play "catch-up" with the infection if you do not start taking them immediately or as prescribed.

A temporary filling has been placed in your tooth. While the temporary filling is strong enough to sustain normal chewing force, try to avoid hard food such as candy, nuts or ice. These foods can also crack the tooth since root canals can result in teeth becoming brittle. Sticky foods or candy such as caramel or gum can pull the temporary out of the tooth, or push the temporary further in to the tooth, breaking the seal, since the temporary is supported by a cotton pellet in the pulp chamber. Some doctors will place medication with the cotton pellet in the tooth; you may taste this medication sometimes.

If the temporary comes out, please call the office to have it replaced. The temporary keeps bacteria and food debris out of your tooth. While this is not an emergency, it is best to have it replaced. If you notice pressure building inside your tooth, however, please call the office to have the temporary removed. Pressure is an indication that the tooth is still infected (or re-infected), which needs to be reopened, disinfected, and may require the prescription of additional antibiotics. Likewise, if you have uncontrolled pain, please do not delay in calling to let us know. Sometimes a different or additional pain medication may be required as well.

Once your root canal treatment is completed, the tooth may continue to be sore and tender for the same reasons described above. Be assured that following these instructions will ultimately result in the tooth feeling better.

Due to the brittleness of the tooth, more extensive treatment such as a post and crown will likely be needed in the future.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any other problems you may consider to be unusual.