

Root Fillings

Why do I need a root filling?

When the dental pulp or “the nerve” inside the tooth has become irreversibly damaged, infected or dead, then the tooth needs root canal treatment. Sometimes the tooth can be painful, but not always. If it is not treated, then there is the possibility that the tooth will cause pain as infection spreads, resulting in abscess formation. Obviously it is better to prevent this rather than wait for the swollen face and sleepless night.

What causes “the nerve” to become damaged, infected or dead?

Tooth decay and trauma are the main culprits. Bacteria in tooth decay can invade “the nerve” causing it to die. Trauma from accidents or breakages can damage “the nerve” too. And sometimes, a tooth happens to be dead for no discernable reason. Additionally, repeated cycles of a tooth being decayed, then drilled, then filled, then decayed again, then filled again, etc., occurring over many years have a detrimental effect on the health of “the nerve”. This is why a symptomless tooth can occasionally give rise to post operative pain following a routine filling.

What is involved in a root filling?

The tooth is always numbed beforehand, so you can relax, confident in the knowledge that the procedure will be comfortable. A small hole is prepared in the tooth so that the affected nerve or its remains can be safely removed and the tooth cleaned out. Then, the root canal is disinfected and filled to help prevent future problems.

How comfortable will it be?

Once the area has been numbed, you can relax. The local anaesthetic means that the procedure should be very straightforward. However, if you want to stop at any time for any reason, then all you have to do is raise your hand. Everything stops because you are in charge.

What are the alternatives to root filling a tooth?

The alternative is to lose the tooth by extraction.

What else do I need to be aware of?

If the tooth is significantly weakened, then a crown or onlay may be required to strengthen and reinforce the tooth. Nothing in this world is 100% successful, and re-infection sometimes occurs, necessitating re-treatment or removal of the tooth.

What about afterwards?

You will be able to drive as normal afterwards. Usually, the only side effect is a numb lip or tongue until the local anaesthetic wears off, approximately three hours or so later. It is possible that some post-operative soreness or swelling can take place, so it is advisable for you to take some anti-inflammatory pain killers such as ibuprofen before the anaesthetic wears off (assuming it is normally safe for you to do so). This helps ease you through the procedure with the minimum of disruption.