

# Endodontics

By Judith Nembhard

## EXPERT ADVICE

### Who Needs Treatment?

Signs to look for include pain, prolonged sensitivity to heat or cold, tenderness to touch and chewing, discoloration of the tooth, and swelling, drainage and tenderness in the lymph nodes as well as nearby bone and gingival tissues. Sometimes, however, there are no symptoms.

Source: American Association of Endodontists

### WHAT IS ENDODONTICS?

Endodontics is a dental specialty concerned with the soft tissue in the center of the tooth, called pulp, and the soft tissues surrounding the root of a tooth. When any of these tissues are diseased or damaged, endodontic treatments can typically save the tooth. Endodontists must complete an additional two to three years of post-graduate training in endodontics following dental school.

### WHAT ISSUES DO ENDODONTISTS TREAT?

An estimated 22.3 million endodontic procedures are performed annually.



## Nipping Tooth Decay & Damage in the Bud

Of these, an estimated 15.1 million are endodontic therapy, commonly called "root canal therapy" or "root canal" for short. Root canal therapy is required when the pulp becomes inflamed or infected as a result of injury or decay; essentially, the surface of the tooth is healthy, but the inside is not. Other common procedures include endodontic retreatment (a repeat of root canal therapy), and treatments related to cracked teeth or dental trauma.

### WHAT IS ROOT CANAL THERAPY?

When performing a root canal procedure, an endodontist extracts inflamed or infected pulp tissue, carefully cleans and shapes the inside of the canal (channel inside the

root), and fills and seals the space. After the procedure, the patient returns to a general dentist to have a crown placed or other restorative work performed to restore the tooth to its natural shape and size. After restoration, the tooth continues to function like any other tooth.

### HOW PAINFUL IS IT?

Most people think root canal procedures are extremely painful. However, most patients who have had one performed with a local anesthetic describe it as virtually painless. The reality is, the pain will persist and worsen if the patient does *not* get a root canal to stop further infection. 

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