

Smiles Better

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An unnerving issue!

How much do you value your teeth? How much would you give for your front tooth?

This was a question that I was asked at a cosmetic course I attended in Manchester. For me no amount of money is worth giving up my front tooth! Many of you will probably agree, but what if the unexpected happens and you have an accident and break your front tooth and the fracture is so deep that you're told the nerve needs to come out or the tooth will need to be extracted and either a denture or implant is placed?

To many patients 'getting the nerve out' (Root canal treatment) sounds painful and is off putting, but it is performed under local anesthetic and in most cases is generally pain free!

So what is a Root Filling?

This is a filling that is placed where the pulp/nerve of the tooth used to be. To understand it fully we need to

think about a tooth which is made up of 2 parts:

- 1: The Crown which is seen in the mouth;
- 2: The Root which anchors the tooth in the bone

These are made up of 4 main parts:

- 1: Enamel, hard outer part of tooth
- 2: Dentine, inner softer part of tooth protecting the pulp
- 3: Cementum, the hard material that coats the root surface
- 4: Dental pulp, which contains blood vessels and nerves

The dental pulp extends from the crown of the tooth to the end of the root, this is call a root canal. A single tooth can have more that one root canal.

If the pulp becomes infected by decay which started in the enamel and spread through the dentine into the pulp the bacteria begin to spread through the root canal and causes the pulp to die. The tooth can then become painful and an abscess can

form. To treat this we can remove the tooth or try to save the tooth by removing the bacteria from the root canal, this is Root Canal Treatment (RCT).

RCT is a complex time consuming and expensive treatment. The main aim is to remove all the bacteria and tissue from the root canal using disinfectants and by manually cleaning the canals with fine files and rotary instruments. Incisors and canines usually have one canal, but premolars and molars can have 2 or 3 roots, which may have one or more root canals. These are very narrow canals which are difficult to see and may sometimes be difficult to find. Treatment may take a few appointments and so the tooth will have a temporary filling in between visits. Once the root filling is in place and sealed we then need to place a strong restoration. A root filled tooth is weaker than a vital tooth and so is more likely to fracture. A crown or Cerec is usually the preferred

restoration. In some cases the tooth can darken, especially if the tooth has died due to trauma. Internal whitening is an option to restore the tooth natural colour.

Results of root treated teeth vary, one review of a number of studies found that 90% of root-treated teeth survived for 8 to 10 years. The study also found that having a crown fitted to the tooth after root canal treatment was the most important factor for improving tooth survival rates.

So although RCT is a great treatment option to save teeth, we'd prefer to keep teeth healthy and alive! Brush twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste, floss and visit your dentist and hygienist on a regular basis. If your a fan of contact sports make sure you wear a sports guard made and fitted by your dentist so protect the teeth from any unnecessary trauma!!

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