

## Root Fillings.

A tooth will need a root filling because the nerves and blood vessels have been damaged by bacteria reaching them through decay or because of a blow to the tooth.

When the bacterial decay gets close enough to the soft tissue inside the tooth, they annoy the nerve and this is when a patient feels pain. Eventually the bacteria enter this tissue and kill it. Sometimes this might mean the pain will stop for a while but this only lasts until enough bacteria grow to form an abscess. Sometimes an abscess might be the first pain a patient has with the tooth, the pulp having died quietly.

In the past, the only solution would have been extraction of the tooth, but you have the option of trying to keep your tooth by having it root filled.

### **Q. Is it painful?**

**A.** Occasionally if the pulp is very inflamed then it can be difficult to get complete pain control with an injectable anaesthetic, or if the tooth is acutely infected. If this is the case, the patient has usually suffered so much anyway they are desperate for any relief, and are usually prepared to put up with some discomfort for a few moments longer. For the same reasons it may be difficult to get complete pain control for an extraction but at least with the previous option you still have a tooth.

### **Q. How long does it take?**

**A.** 2 to 3 visits around thirty minutes each.

### **Q. Are all Root fillings successful?**

**A.** No- but more succeed than fail. Reasons for failure include canals that cannot be found or cleaned out properly because of their curved nature, the presence of microscopic accessory canals, and instruments separating in the canals.

### **Q. Why bother it's only a tooth?**

**A.** Front teeth should be obvious. Back teeth are important for chewing, and the loss of one will allow other ones to move thereby creating food traps which may allow more disease to get started.

Root fillings are not always recommended, as the tooth must be both useful and durable long term. Some teeth will never be strong again, even if covered with an artificial crown, and should be extracted.

Most teeth that need root filling are weak to start with because decay has robbed them of their strength. A tooth is more brittle after losing its blood supply, therefore a patient should not have a tooth root filled if they are not also committed to a crown when the root filling has had some time to prove itself. There are a few root filled teeth that may not need an artificial crown.

### **Treatment sequence:**

1. Tooth infected
2. Radiograph tooth
3. Opening made to centre of tooth
4. Root canals cleaned with fine canal instruments. A radiograph is taken with instruments in the canals to calculate how long the roots are.
5. Root filling material packed in canal{s}. Final radiograph. Crown restored.

Rubber dam is often used for this work. The patient's mouth is protected behind a sheet of latex with only the tooth being worked on showing, the latex having a small hole in it to stretch over the tooth.