



Fact Sheet

Endodontics and Endodontists

Endodontics

Endodontics is the science of treating problems with the tissue inside the tooth. When this tissue or the tissue surrounding the tooth root is diseased or damaged due to decay or trauma, endodontic treatment typically can save the tooth.

Endodontists

Endodontists are dentists with special training in diagnosing and treating oral and facial pain, and problems associated with the inside of the tooth.

- o There are approximately 4,000 active endodontists in the United States.
- o Over the past two decades, the number of endodontists has grown by 84 percent, outpacing growth among general practitioners and other dental specialists. Growth is expected to continue in the coming years and decades.
- o Endodontists employ a range of endodontic procedures to save natural teeth, including performing root canals (the most common endodontic procedure), repairing cracked teeth and replacing avulsed teeth (teeth knocked out by injury).

Endodontic Education

Endodontists must complete four years of dental school plus two or more years of advanced training in endodontics.

- o There are 50 postdoctoral endodontic training programs in the United States.
- o Approximately 400 postdoctoral dental students are enrolled in those programs.

Common Endodontic Symptoms

Patients may need endodontic treatment, including root canals, if they experience any of the following symptoms:

- o Prolonged dental sensitivity to heat or cold;
- o Tenderness of teeth to touch and chewing; or
- o Facial or oral swelling.



Root Canals

A root canal is needed when the pulp (the soft tissue inside the tooth) becomes inflamed or infected as a result of injury, deep decay, repeated dental procedures on the tooth, or a cracked or chipped tooth.

- o Most patients who have had a root canal performed by an endodontist describe the procedure as virtually painless.
- o Eighty-five percent of patients who have had a root canal performed by an endodontist would return to an endodontist for future work.
- o Between 1990 and 1999, the number of root canals performed in the United States increased by 13 percent to nearly 16 million.
- o Root canals performed by endodontists are a better and common alternative to tooth extraction.
- o When performing a root canal, an endodontist removes inflamed or infected pulp, carefully cleans and shapes the inside of the canal (a channel inside the root), and fills and seals the space.
- o After performing the procedure, the endodontist returns the patient to a general dentist to have a crown placed or other restorative work performed.
- o After restoration, the tooth continues to function like any other tooth.

Saving Natural Teeth

Although it is possible in some cases to replace an extracted tooth with an implant or bridgework, Americans have strong negative feelings about losing their natural teeth.

- o In a recent AAE survey, 76 percent of participants said they would prefer a root canal to tooth extraction.
- o Nearly a third would not sell a healthy front tooth for any amount of money.
- o Most people are not aware that root canal treatment is a viable alternative to tooth extraction.
- o Older individuals are much more likely than younger individuals to have experienced a tooth extraction.
- o Women are more likely than men to have had a tooth extraction.
- o More than half (58 percent) of those who have had a tooth extracted did not replace it with anything; the remainder replaced the tooth with a bridge (17 percent), dentures (12 percent) or an implant (8 percent).
- o Artificial teeth can limit your ability to chew certain foods necessary to maintaining a balanced diet.



About Endodontists: the Root Canal Specialists

The AAE launched a public and professional awareness campaign, *Endodontists: the root canal specialists*, in 2005, to educate consumers about what endodontists do, dispel myths and misperceptions about root canals and endodontic treatments, and ensure that other dental professionals understand and value the expertise endodontists bring to their patients. For more information about the campaign, visit www.aae.org/rootcanalspecialists.

About the AAE

The American Association of Endodontists, headquartered in Chicago, represents more than 6,300 members worldwide, including approximately 95 percent of all eligible endodontists in the United States. The Association, founded in 1943, is dedicated to excellence in the art and science of endodontics and to the highest standard of patient care. The Association inspires its members to pursue professional advancement and personal fulfillment through education, research, advocacy, leadership, communication and service. For more information, visit the AAE Web site at www.aae.org.