

Are there any risks involved in root canal treatment?

Yes, as with any medical or dental procedure, there are some risks. The common risks are as follows.

1. **Bleeding, pain, soreness and infection:** After your root canal treatment you may experience pain, swelling or discomfort for several days, which may be treated with pain medication. You may also experience an infection following treatment, which would be treated with antibiotics.
2. **Reaction to local anesthetics:** Local anesthetics may cause your heart rate to increase and your hands to feel shaky.
3. **Stiff or sore jaw joint:** Holding your mouth open during treatment and dental injections (shot) may temporarily leave your jaw feeling stiff and sore and may make it difficult for you to open your mouth wide for several days afterwards. Treatment may leave the corners of your mouth red or cracked for several days.
4. **Numbness:** With any dental procedure that requires anesthetic (numbing), there is a possibility of lingering numbness. This numbness can last for an extended period of time (usually 1 to 4 months). Problems with numbness are most likely occur in the lower jaw and can leave your lip or tongue numb for a time. This occurs because of damage to a nerve during the shot. The condition is called paresthesia and is described as transient, since it will eventually go away and the numb sensation will not be present. In addition a severe infection and or swelling can also result in numbness that is not a lasting condition, but goes away a few weeks after the infection or swelling clears up. Again, this condition occurs mostly in the lower jaw.
5. **Broken instrument:** Occasionally a root canal cleaning instrument will break off in a root canal that is twisted, curved or blocked with calcium deposits or prior filling materials. Depending on its location, the fragment can be retrieved or it may be necessary to seal it in the root canal (these instruments are made of sterile, non-toxic surgical stainless steel or nickel titanium, so they cause no harm). The broken instrument can be sealed in the canal with the root filling material or it can be removed by performing an apicoectomy.
6. **Overfill:** As a result of filling the root canal, the incomplete formation of your tooth or an abscess at the end of the tooth (called the apex), an opening may exist between the root canal and the bone or tissue surrounding the tooth. This opening can allow filling material to be forced out of the root canal into the surrounding bone and tissue. A surgical procedure (apicoectomy-see #8) may be necessary to retrieve the filling material and seal the root canal.
7. **Fracture of the tooth:** Most teeth having root canal treatment are weakened by the original cavity or large filling. These teeth are prone to fracture. You should return to your dentist for a permanent filling as soon as possible. Sometimes the tooth may already be fractured, or fracture before the final root canal visit. This may result in the extraction of the tooth or persisting symptoms.

8. Need for further treatment: In some cases, root canal treatment may not relieve all symptoms. If you suffer from gum disease (also called periodontal disease), this can increase the chance of losing a tooth even though root canal treatment was successful. Twisted, curved or blocked root canals may prevent removal of all the inflamed or infected pulp. Leaving pulp in the root canal may cause your symptoms to worsen. If the pulp tissue cannot be removed you may need an additional procedure. An apicoectomy, mentioned above is a surgical procedure involving cutting a small opening in the gum and bone, removing the root tip and placing a filling or seal over the end of the root canal. An apicoectomy may also be necessary if your tooth does not heal (symptoms or infection continue).