Dental Implants or Root Canal Treatment? | Core Dental

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Details:

Root canal treatment aims to save a natural tooth that is infected or inflamed, while a dental implant replaces a tooth that is missing or cannot be kept. Neither is right for everyone. The choice depends on how much healthy tooth structure remains, the health of the surrounding gum and bone, your general health and your goals. At Core Dental our dentists, and registered specialists where a case is complex, examine your tooth and explain the options so you can decide.

What is root canal treatment?

Root canal treatment, also called endodontic treatment, is a procedure designed to save a natural tooth that has become infected or inflamed. Inside every tooth is a soft core called the pulp, which contains nerves and blood vessels. When bacteria reach the pulp through deep decay, a crack or an injury, it can become painful and infected.

During treatment your dentist removes the affected pulp, cleans and disinfects the canal system inside the root, and then fills the canals with a biocompatible material to help prevent bacteria from returning. A dental dam is placed over the tooth during the procedure to keep the area clean and dry. You can read more about it in our article on what a dental dam is .

Root canal treatment today is a comfortable procedure with local anaesthetic. Depending on the tooth and the infection, it may take one visit or several, with a temporary filling in between. Most treated teeth then need a crown or a similar restoration to protect them.

When is root canal treatment recommended?

Root canal treatment is generally suitable when the tooth can realistically be kept for the long term. That usually means the tooth is not severely broken down, cracked or decayed, and the surrounding gum and bone are reasonably healthy. It is often necessary when the pulp is irreversibly inflamed, the nerve is dying, or decay has spread into the pulp chamber.

The benefits are relief from pain and the chance to keep your own tooth, which avoids extraction. Success varies, and it is generally good for teeth that can be properly restored, but your dentist can only advise after examining the tooth and taking X-rays. Our articles on why you may need root canal treatment and what to expect from a root canal explain the process in more detail.

What is a dental implant?

A dental implant replaces a missing tooth, or a tooth that has a hopeless outlook. A small titanium post is placed into the jawbone where it acts as an artificial root. After the area has healed and the implant has integrated with the bone, a crown is attached to the post to restore the look and function of the tooth.

The goal of both treatments is the same: a functional tooth. With root canal treatment the base of that tooth is your own natural root. With an implant, the base is a prosthetic root.

Implants need enough healthy bone and gum, and they involve a planned, staged process. We offer conventional implants and immediate implants , and our dental implants page explains the options.

Which is the right choice for you?

There is no single correct treatment for every tooth. There is, however, usually a suitable option for your particular case, and our dentists can explain the advantages and limits of each. Factors that influence the decision include:

How much natural tooth remains. A tooth with very little healthy structure left may not support a lasting restoration.

Previous treatment. If the same tooth has already had a root canal, the long-term outlook of retreatment may be reduced.

Cracks and gum health. A deep crack or advanced gum disease can affect whether a tooth can be kept.

General health. Conditions such as diabetes and osteoporosis, and habits such as smoking, can affect healing and the long-term success of dental implants. Please tell us about your medical history and any medicines you take.

Cost, time and preference. The number of visits, total fees and how you feel about each approach all matter.

Our general approach is conservative: where a tooth can reasonably be kept, we usually encourage patients to explore keeping it, because once a tooth is extracted it cannot be put back. If a tooth is restorable, we recommend an examination and a conversation about its prognosis with one of our dentists, or with a registered endodontist if the tooth is complex. If a tooth is very broken down and has lost significant structure, its long-term outlook is reduced and an implant may be a sensible alternative. Either way, we will explain the reasons, the risks and the costs before you decide.

What are the risks and limits of each option?

Both treatments carry risks, and results vary between people.

Root canal treatment. Infection can persist or return, a treated tooth can crack or fracture, and further treatment is sometimes needed. A crown is usually advised to protect the tooth.

Dental implants. Risks include infection around the implant, failure of the implant to integrate with the bone, and complications for people with certain health conditions or who smoke. Implants require regular cleaning and review.

Extraction. Removing a tooth is permanent, and a gap can affect your bite and neighbouring teeth if it is not replaced.

What does it cost, and can you spread the payments?

Fees depend on the tooth, the complexity of the case and any restoration needed afterwards, so we quote in writing before treatment starts. Interest-free payment plans are available for eligible treatment. Terms vary by finance provider and eligibility, so please confirm current figures and conditions when you book. Health fund rebates may apply for some items, and HICAPS claiming is available at our clinics.

Keeping the tooth is the first option, and the published advice says so

Faced with a tooth whose nerve is affected, the choice is usually framed as root canal treatment versus an implant. The published material has a clear preference, and a clear reason for it.

The Victorian Department of Health, on the shift in approach: "In the past, people often had their natural teeth pulled out when there was a problem and had them replaced with false teeth (dentures). These days, dental practitioners aim to help you keep your natural teeth for as long as possible."

And the sentence that settles the comparison in principle: "Of course, no therapy or replacement will last as well as a healthy tooth."

Why a treated tooth can be kept. "The main function of the dental pulp is to regulate the growth and development of the tooth during childhood. Once the tooth is fully formed, nutrition for the tooth comes from the tissues surrounding the root. Therefore, a tooth can function without its pulp and, in most cases, can be kept indefinitely."

Can be kept indefinitely. That is the Department's own wording for a tooth after root canal treatment.

How often it works. "Success rates for endodontic treatment are generally high. About 90 to 95 per cent of people who undergo root canal treatment can expect a functional tooth after the treatment." The measure is a functional tooth — worth reading precisely rather than as a general guarantee.

And what it depends on afterwards. "The treated tooth should last a very long time, provided that you maintain good oral hygiene, avoid consuming too much sugar and have regular dental check ups."

What the treatment involves, briefly. Four aims: removing "any old or leaky fillings, tooth decay, infected nerve tissue, pus and debris"; shaping the canals into "smooth, hollow tunnels that are free of irregularities where residual bacteria may sit"; sealing them "with a long-lasting barrier material"; and a final restoration so "no bacteria from the mouth can leak back into the tooth". The disinfecting stage is why it can take time: it "may take a few weeks to months for these solutions to take maximum effect against stubborn bacteria within the tooth, and this step may have to be repeated several times".

The tooth may also need more than a filling at the end: teeth requiring root canal treatment "have sometimes lost a lot of tooth structure due to previous decay or cracks and may require further protection in the form of posts, crowns or other similar materials".

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Root canal treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 14 July 2025); Dentures, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 4 August 2026). Both accessed 6 November 2026.

What an implant asks for that a saved tooth does not

An implant is a good option in the right circumstances, and the published description makes clear what those circumstances are. Comparing it to a saved tooth is mostly a comparison of conditions.

What it is. "A dental implant is made of 2 main parts: a titanium screw that fuses with the jaw bone and a ceramic tooth that fits over the screw", and it "replaces a missing tooth or teeth, without damaging neighbouring teeth."

What has to be true first. "The area of the missing tooth needs to be studied to make sure it is suitable for an implant. This includes looking at the gum and bone health, amount of space, your bite, and your general health."

Gum and bone health is the first item — and this is where the sequence matters, because losing the tooth to infection can compromise exactly that. The Department's warning on an untreated infected tooth: "loss of tooth - the tooth may have to be removed, which can affect eating or appearance. Tooth replacement options are available but may be limited if the infection has already caused advanced bone loss."

So delaying treatment on an infected tooth can narrow the replacement options as well as losing the tooth.

The time. "It can take up to 6 months for the bone to fuse strongly to the screw. A temporary tooth may be provided for you to wear in the meantime."

The conditions that raise the risk. "The bone may not fuse to the implant, and the implant will need to be removed. People who are at a greater risk include those who: smoke; have diabetes; have some bone conditions such as osteoporosis; are immune compromised."

The ongoing obligation. "It is more difficult to clean around an implant than a natural tooth. Gum disease around an implant can be very difficult to treat. If severe, the implant will need to be removed. This area may no longer be suitable for future implants."

And the anatomy. "Depending on your anatomy, there may be some risk of damage to nearby structures like nerves or sinuses."

The honest comparison, then. A saved tooth needs good hygiene, less sugar and regular check-ups, and "can be kept indefinitely". An implant needs suitable bone and gum health, up to six months of healing, no bone-fusion failure, harder daily cleaning with the site itself at stake, and a favourable anatomy. Neither is better in the abstract. But the Department's framing — that no replacement "will last as well as a healthy tooth", and that practitioners "aim to help you keep your natural teeth for as long as possible" — puts the burden of argument on replacing rather than saving.

What to ask. "What options are available and the pros and the cons of each option."; "What results can be reasonably expected."; "What costs, time and money, are involved and if payment options are available."; "Any possible side effects or complications." And if a specialist opinion would help on the endodontic side: "If you would like a specialist opinion, ask your dentist for a referral to an endodontist."

One prerequisite for either path. "The first step is to make sure your teeth and mouth are in good health", and "treat any disease first. Your health is the priority."

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Cosmetic dentistry and teeth whitening, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 12 December 2025); Root canal treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 14 July 2025). Both accessed 6 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Is a root canal painful?

Root canal treatment is done under local anaesthetic, so the procedure itself should be comfortable. The tooth may feel sore for a few days afterwards, and your dentist will give you aftercare advice and discuss pain relief.

How many visits does a root canal take?

It depends on the tooth and the infection. Some teeth are treated in one visit, while others need two or three with a temporary filling in between. Your dentist will explain the plan after examining the tooth.

Will I need a crown after root canal treatment?

Often, yes. A tooth that has had root canal treatment can be weakened, so a crown or similar restoration is commonly advised to protect it. Your dentist will recommend what suits your tooth.

Can any tooth be replaced with an implant?

Not always. Implants need enough healthy bone and gum, and your general health matters too. An examination and imaging help your dentist work out whether an implant is suitable for you.

Does smoking affect implants and healing?

Smoking can slow healing and may reduce the long-term success of dental implants. If you smoke, please tell your dentist so that we can discuss the risks and ways to support healing.

Is it better to save the tooth or replace it with an implant?

The published advice leans towards saving. The Victorian Department of Health notes that "these days, dental practitioners aim to help you keep your natural teeth for as long as possible", and states plainly that "no therapy or replacement will last as well as a healthy tooth".

Can a tooth really be kept after root canal treatment?

Yes. "Once the tooth is fully formed, nutrition for the tooth comes from the tissues surrounding the root. Therefore, a tooth can function without its pulp and, in most cases, can be kept indefinitely."

How often does root canal treatment work?

"About 90 to 95 per cent of people who undergo root canal treatment can expect a functional tooth after the treatment." The stated measure is a functional tooth.

What does the treated tooth need afterwards?

"The treated tooth should last a very long time, provided that you maintain good oral hygiene, avoid consuming too much sugar and have regular dental check ups." It may also need "further protection in the form of posts, crowns or other similar materials" where a lot of tooth structure has been lost.

Why does root canal treatment sometimes take weeks?

The disinfecting stage. It "may take a few weeks to months for these solutions to take maximum effect against stubborn bacteria within the tooth, and this step may have to be repeated several times".

What does an implant need in order to work?

Suitable conditions. "The area of the missing tooth needs to be studied to make sure it is suitable for an implant. This includes looking at the gum and bone health, amount of space, your bite, and your general health."

Does losing the tooth first affect whether an implant is possible?

It can. On an untreated infected tooth, the Department warns that "tooth replacement options are available but may be limited if the infection has already caused advanced bone loss".

How long does an implant take?

"It can take up to 6 months for the bone to fuse strongly to the screw", with a temporary tooth usually provided in the meantime.

What can go wrong with an implant?

Four published risks: the ceramic can chip or break; the bone may not fuse, with greater risk for people who "smoke; have diabetes; have some bone conditions such as osteoporosis; are immune compromised"; gum disease around it "can be very difficult to treat" and severe cases mean removal, after which "this area may no longer be suitable for future implants"; and "depending on your anatomy, there may be some risk of damage to nearby structures like nerves or sinuses".

Is an implant easier to look after?

No — harder. "It is more difficult to clean around an implant than a natural tooth."

Can I get a second opinion on saving the tooth?

Yes. "If you would like a specialist opinion, ask your dentist for a referral to an endodontist." Endodontists "are dentists who are specialists in root canal treatment".

What should I ask before choosing?

"What options are available and the pros and the cons of each option."; "What results can be reasonably expected."; "What costs, time and money, are involved and if payment options are available."; "Any possible side effects or complications."

Related services and further reading

Root canal therapy

Endodontics

Dental implants

Conventional implants

Root canal treatment or implants: which is right for me?

What is root canal treatment, and why might I need it?

What can I eat or drink after root canal treatment?

Does smoking affect dental implants?

Dental crowns

How can we help?

If you have a painful or damaged tooth and are unsure whether to keep it or replace it, our team can examine it at any of our nine Core Dental clinics. Call 13 13 16 or book online. We explain your options, risks and costs in writing before treatment starts, and we can talk you through interest-free payment plans for eligible treatment.

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week, with Monday to Friday hours to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online at coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday mornings, Sunday closed
Clinics	Southbank , South Melbourne , Caroline Springs , Carrum Downs , Epping , Wyndham , Berwick , Bayside , Glenferrie

Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is general in nature and is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

What does root canal treatment involve?

Root canal treatment removes the infected or inflamed pulp from inside a tooth, cleans and disinfects the canals, and fills them to help keep bacteria out. Core Dental dentists use a dental dam to keep the tooth clean and dry.

When is root canal treatment suitable?

It is generally suitable when the tooth can realistically be kept, with enough healthy structure and reasonably healthy gum, and when the pulp is irreversibly inflamed or infected. Core Dental dentists assess this with an examination and X-rays.

How does an implant replace a missing tooth?

A dental implant is a titanium post placed into the jawbone to replace a missing tooth root, with a crown attached once it has healed. Core Dental offers conventional and immediate implants after an individual assessment.

Does Core Dental have specialists for complex root canal cases?

Core Dental dentists can refer complex teeth to registered specialists, including endodontists, where appropriate. Your dentist will explain whether referral is advisable after examining your tooth.

Why might a tooth be kept rather than extracted?

Keeping a natural tooth avoids the permanent step of extraction, and a root canal treated tooth with a crown can often function for many years. Core Dental dentists will explain the outlook for your own tooth before you decide.

What health factors affect dental implant success?

Diabetes, osteoporosis and smoking can affect healing and the long-term success of implants. Core Dental dentists ask about your medical history so they can explain how it may affect your options.

How does Core Dental help with the cost of root canal or implant treatment?

Core Dental quotes in writing before treatment starts and offers interest-free payment plans for eligible patients. HICAPS claiming is available on site. Please confirm current terms and fees when you book.

How do I book a tooth assessment at Core Dental?

Call 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au for any of our nine clinics. Tell our team about your tooth pain or missing tooth so we can allow time for an examination and X-rays.