Eating and Drinking While Numb After a Root Canal | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/what-can-i-eat-or-drink-after-root-canal-treatment/

Details:

After root canal treatment the local anaesthetic can leave your tooth, lip, gum, cheek and tongue numb for a few hours, and the time varies from person to person. While you are numb, it is easy to bite the inside of your mouth or burn yourself on hot food and drink without noticing. At Core Dental we suggest waiting until the feeling returns before you eat, then choosing soft, lukewarm foods and chewing on the side opposite the treated tooth.

Why should you wait for the numbness to wear off before eating or drinking?

Local anaesthetic blocks feeling in the area we have treated, and that often includes your lip, cheek, gum and tongue as well as the tooth. If you eat or drink while numb, you may accidentally bite your lip, cheek or tongue, or burn yourself on something very hot, because you cannot feel the warning signs. The numbness usually fades gradually, and how long it lasts depends on the person and the anaesthetic used. Our team will let you know what to expect before you leave.

What general guidelines should you follow when eating after root canal treatment?

When you do start eating, these simple habits help protect your mouth:

Chew on the side of your mouth opposite the treatment, which is usually the side that is not numb.

Choose soft foods that need very little chewing.

Eat slowly and carefully, especially while some numbness remains.

Avoid very hot foods and drinks such as hot soup, hot tea or hot coffee until the feeling has fully returned.

Your tooth may feel tender for a short time after treatment, so gentle eating is sensible. If you have questions about your own recovery, please ask your dentist, as advice can differ depending on the tooth and the treatment.

Is it a good idea to avoid food and only drink cold water while you are numb?

Some people prefer to have nothing but cold water while their mouth is numb. This may not suit everyone. A noticeable drop in blood sugar can make you feel unwell, and this is an especially important consideration if you have diabetes. If you manage diabetes or another medical condition, please tell us before your appointment and ask your dentist or endodontist what is suitable for you. We can also help you plan the timing of your appointment around meals and medicines.

Which soft fruits and smoothies suit you after a root canal?

Soft fruits such as banana, mango and peach suit a tender tooth and need little chewing. Fruit smoothies can also be an easy way to take in nutrients and vitamins while you are recovering. Keep smoothies lukewarm to cool rather than very cold if your tooth is sensitive, and avoid adding seeds, nuts or crunchy toppings.

Which dairy foods are suitable after root canal treatment?

Yoghurt, milk, milkshakes and ice cream are usually easy to manage after treatment, as long as the ice cream has no nuts or crunchy pieces. If cold makes your tooth uncomfortable, let the food warm slightly first.

When should you contact us after a root canal?

Mild tenderness for a short time can be expected, but please contact your Core Dental practice promptly if you have severe pain, swelling, a temporary filling that comes out, or a bite that feels uneven. Call 000 immediately for uncontrollable bleeding, difficulty breathing or swallowing, serious facial injury or other life-threatening symptoms. We reserve emergency appointments where we can, so call 13 13 16 and describe what is happening.

How can we help?

If you are planning root canal treatment, or you have a question about recovery, our team can help at any of our nine Core Dental practices. Call 13 13 16 or book online. You can read more about root canal therapy , emergency dentistry and what a root canal involves and why it may be needed .

Where this page's own question stands

This page asks what you can eat or drink once root canal treatment is done. We have to be straightforward about something: the published state health advice does not answer it.

The Victorian Department of Health's page on root canal treatment is detailed — it sets out the procedure, the symptoms, the causes, the complications, the success rate and who performs it. It gives no eating or drinking guidance for the period following treatment. No waiting period, no list of foods, no temperature advice.

So we are not going to invent one. A page that fills that gap with plausible-sounding instructions is worse than a page that tells you where the instructions actually come from: your own dentist, for your own tooth. They know which stage your treatment is at, what material is sealing the tooth today, and whether anything is temporary. That is exactly the information any sensible dietary instruction depends on, and it is not information a web page has.

Why the stage matters so much here. The Department describes treatment that is often not finished in one appointment: "You may need more than one visit to complete the treatment, depending on the difficulty of the procedure." The disinfecting stage is why — 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."

A tooth between visits is in a different state from a tooth with its final restoration in place, and the Department is explicit that the final restoration is part of the treatment: its fourth aim is that "a large, well-sealed restoration is put on the tooth", so that "no bacteria from the mouth can leak back into the tooth".

And technique varies between practitioners. "The exact procedure chosen by your dentist may differ from the procedure outlined here." That sentence is the Department's own reason for sending specific questions to the person treating you.

So what about the guidance above on this page? That is Core Dental's own clinical advice, given as the practice's own and not presented as a published state health position. The distinction is worth making explicitly: waiting for numbness to pass, choosing soft foods and chewing on the other side are our practice's suggestions from clinical experience, not instructions we can attribute to the Department. Your treating dentist may give you different advice for your own tooth, and theirs is the one to follow.

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Root canal treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 14 July 2025). Accessed 6 November 2026.

What the published advice does say about diet and a treated tooth

There is sourced dietary guidance here. It is about keeping the tooth for years rather than about the first evening, and it is more useful than most post-treatment lists.

The Department's condition for longevity, stated once and worth reading closely: "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."

Three conditions, and one of them is dietary. Not a food to avoid for a day — a pattern to keep.

Why sugar in particular. The Department's decay page explains the mechanism: bacteria "use the sugars in the food and drinks you consume to create the energy they need to live", and in doing so "create acid as a waste product. This acid dissolves the crystals of your teeth and causes mineral loss, weakening the tooth." And the variable is frequency: "The more frequently you eat or drink sugary things, the more often the bacteria produce acid."

Hence its practical advice: "avoid sugary snacks between meals. If you're going to have something sweet, try to have it at mealtimes", and "be conscious of hidden sugars in snacks, cereals and other packaged products".

A restoration does not protect the tooth from new decay. "Just filling a hole will not stop tooth decay from occurring in other areas of the mouth or around the new filling." For a tooth that has had root canal treatment and carries a large restoration, the margin where material meets tooth is exactly where that matters.

Which makes cleaning between teeth the practical priority. "It is important to clean between teeth where a toothbrush can't reach", and without floss or an interdental brush "up to a third of each tooth doesn't get cleaned".

On drinks, the acid list is broader than sugar. The Department asks you to "limit sugary and acidic drinks such as soft drinks (including sugar-free/diet and regular), sports drinks, cordials and fruit juices", and describes fluoridated tap water as "the best drink for oral health". After anything acidic, its instruction is to "wait at least 30 minutes after the acid exposure before brushing your teeth".

What the treatment achieves when all that holds. "About 90 to 95 per cent of people who undergo root canal treatment can expect a functional tooth after the treatment", and a tooth without its pulp "can function without its pulp and, in most cases, can be kept indefinitely". With the Department's own caveat: "no therapy or replacement will last as well as a healthy tooth."

Symptoms that should prompt a call rather than a dietary change , from the Department's list: "unprovoked or spontaneous pain"; "sensitivity to hot and cold drinks and foods"; "pain when biting or chewing"; "loosening of the tooth"; "swelling of the gum near the affected tooth"; "oozing of pus surrounding the affected tooth"; "facial swelling". And if a filling has come away: "If part of your filling breaks off or if your whole filling falls out, see your oral health professional as soon as possible."

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Root canal treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 14 July 2025); Tooth decay, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 28 June 2025); Teeth and mouth care, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 25 July 2025); Dental fillings, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 1 August 2025); Dental erosion, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 22 October 2025). All accessed 6 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

How long should I wait before eating after a root canal?

Wait until the numbness has worn off, which can take a few hours and differs between people. Eating too soon risks biting your cheek, lip or tongue. Once the feeling has returned, start with soft foods and ask us if you are unsure.

Can I drink coffee or tea after root canal treatment?

Please avoid hot drinks while you are numb because you may not feel a burn. Once feeling has returned, warm rather than very hot drinks are kind to a tender tooth. If a drink causes discomfort, leave it for a day or so.

Which side of my mouth should I chew on?

Chew on the side opposite the tooth we treated, which is usually the side that is not numb. This keeps pressure off the tender tooth while it settles. Your dentist will tell you when it is fine to chew normally again.

Is ice cream safe to eat after a root canal?

Plain ice cream without nuts or crunchy pieces is generally easy to eat. If cold makes your tooth sensitive, let it soften a little first, and wait until numbness has gone so you can feel the temperature.

What if I have diabetes and cannot go without food?

Please tell us about diabetes when you book. We can help you plan the appointment time, and your dentist or endodontist can advise on eating once the treatment is finished. Soft foods such as yoghurt or a smoothie can be a gentle option.

Does the published state health advice say what to eat once treatment is done?

No. The Victorian Department of Health's page on root canal treatment covers the procedure, symptoms, causes, complications, success rate and who performs it — but gives no eating or drinking guidance for the period following treatment. We are not going to supply instructions it does not contain.

Who should I ask then?

The dentist treating you. They know which stage your treatment is at and what is sealing the tooth today, and the Department itself notes that "the exact procedure chosen by your dentist may differ from the procedure outlined here".

Why does the stage of treatment matter?

Because treatment is often spread over appointments. "You may need more than one visit to complete the treatment, depending on the difficulty of the procedure", and the disinfecting stage "may take a few weeks to months for these solutions to take maximum effect".

Is the final restoration part of the treatment?

Yes. The Department's fourth aim is that "a large, well-sealed restoration is put on the tooth", so that "no bacteria from the mouth can leak back into the tooth".

Is there any sourced dietary advice for a treated tooth?

Yes, for the long term. "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."

Why sugar specifically?

Because of the mechanism. Bacteria turn sugars into energy and "create acid as a waste product. This acid dissolves the crystals of your teeth and causes mineral loss, weakening the tooth." And frequency is the variable: "The more frequently you eat or drink sugary things, the more often the bacteria produce acid."

What is the practical version of that?

"Avoid sugary snacks between meals. If you're going to have something sweet, try to have it at mealtimes", and "be conscious of hidden sugars in snacks, cereals and other packaged products".

Does a restoration protect the tooth from new decay?

No. "Just filling a hole will not stop tooth decay from occurring in other areas of the mouth or around the new filling."

What should I be cleaning most carefully?

Between the teeth. "It is important to clean between teeth where a toothbrush can't reach", and without floss or an interdental brush "up to a third of each tooth doesn't get cleaned".

What should I drink?

"Fluoridated tap water is the best drink for oral health." The Department asks you to limit "soft drinks (including sugar-free/diet and regular), sports drinks, cordials and fruit juices", and after anything acidic to "wait at least 30 minutes after the acid exposure before brushing your teeth".

What symptoms should prompt a call?

"Unprovoked or spontaneous pain"; "sensitivity to hot and cold drinks and foods"; "pain when biting or chewing"; "loosening of the tooth"; "swelling of the gum near the affected tooth"; "oozing of pus surrounding the affected tooth"; "facial swelling". And if a filling comes away, "see your oral health professional as soon as possible".

How well does the treatment usually work?

"About 90 to 95 per cent of people who undergo root canal treatment can expect a functional tooth after the treatment", and a tooth "can function without its pulp and, in most cases, can be kept indefinitely" — with the caveat that "no therapy or replacement will last as well as a healthy tooth".

Related services and further reading

Root canal therapy

General dentistry

Emergency dentistry

What is root canal therapy and why might you need it?

Dental implants or root canal treatment: which is better?

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

Contact Core Dental

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: Monday to Friday 8.00am 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 through coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday mornings, Sunday closed

This article is general in nature and does not replace advice from a registered dental practitioner who has examined you. Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

Why can you burn or bite yourself after a root canal?

Local anaesthetic at Core Dental leaves the tooth, lip, gum, cheek and tongue numb for a few hours, so you may not feel biting or heat. That is why our team suggests waiting for the feeling to return before eating or drinking anything hot.

What foods are gentle after a root canal at Core Dental?

Our dentists suggest soft foods that need little chewing, such as banana, mango, peach, yoghurt, milk, milkshakes and smoothies, plus ice cream without nuts or crunchy pieces. Chew on the side opposite the treated tooth and eat slowly.

Should I avoid hot drinks straight after root canal treatment?

Yes. While you are numb you cannot reliably feel temperature, so we advise avoiding hot soup, tea and coffee at Core Dental until feeling has fully returned. Warm rather than very hot drinks are kind to a tender tooth afterwards.

Is it safe to skip food and only drink cold water while numb?

Some people choose this, but a large drop in blood sugar can make you feel sick, particularly if you have diabetes. At Core Dental we ask you to tell us about diabetes so your dentist or endodontist can advise you.

Which side should I chew on after a root canal?

Our team at Core Dental advises chewing on the side opposite the treated tooth, usually the side that is not numb, until your dentist says normal chewing is fine. This keeps pressure off the tender tooth.

Who do I call if pain continues after a root canal?

Call Core Dental on 13 13 16 and describe your symptoms, such as severe pain, swelling or a lost temporary filling. We reserve emergency appointments where possible. For life-threatening symptoms call 000.

How do I book a root canal appointment at Core Dental?

Call 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au. Tell our team about your symptoms and any medical conditions, and we will arrange an examination so your dentist can explain your options and quote before treatment starts.