



# Veterinary Dental Services, LLC

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## Root Canal Therapy for your Pet

Unless you have had a root canal yourself and understand what it involves, the term alone can make you cringe. This handout explains why a root canal might be recommended for your pet and exactly what the procedure involves.

### Why is a root canal being recommended for my pet?

A root canal is performed in order to save your pet's tooth when it has disease of the pulp, also known as endodontic disease. The pulp tissue is made up of tiny blood vessels, nerves, lymphatic and connective tissues. An injury to the pulp can lead to pain, infection, and death of the pulp tissue. Endodontic disease can be caused by multiple factors. By far the most common cause is a fractured tooth, or a tooth that has sustained some trauma, often causing discoloration of the tooth. If left untreated for long periods of time the tooth may eventually abscess, resulting in facial swelling and potentially drainage of pus. Root canal therapy relieves pain and treats infection.

All of your pet's teeth are very important to daily activities. The canine teeth, or "fang" teeth in the front of the mouth, are used to puncture and hold things, similarly to how we use our thumb and first finger. The carnassial teeth are the four large teeth in the back of the mouth. These teeth are important in chewing and shearing. The incisor teeth are in the front of the mouth, and are useful in picking things up. The incisor, canine and carnassial teeth are commonly injured, and because of their importance, we recommend saving them if possible.

### What is a root canal?

A root canal involves removing the diseased pulp tissues from the center of the tooth, filling the canal with an inert material, and then restoring the access or fracture site with a filling. The first step is to create or enlarge an access hole to the pulp canal. For multiple rooted teeth there may be more than one access point. A series of files and antibacterial flushes are used to remove the infected material from the canal. Once the canal has been dried it is then filled with a small amount of sealing cement, followed by a rubber material called gutta percha. After the canal has been properly filled, the access is then filled with restorative materials. A final dental radiograph is taken to ensure a good fill.

### What are the advantages and disadvantages to root canal therapy?

The main advantage to root canal therapy is to save the function of the tooth so that it does not need to be extracted. Another advantage to root canal therapy is that the procedure itself is much less invasive than an extraction. Sometimes it is easier to perform than an extraction! There are a few disadvantages to root canal therapy.

One disadvantage is that it is typically more expensive than an extraction. Another is that it sometimes requires more time to perform a root canal than an extraction. Finally, root canals require periodic dental radiographs under anesthesia, so there is an added expense and additional anesthesia to perform recommended follow up. Anesthesia can be safe for pets, so please do not make your decision on anesthesia alone. Our veterinarians would be happy to discuss any of your concerns.

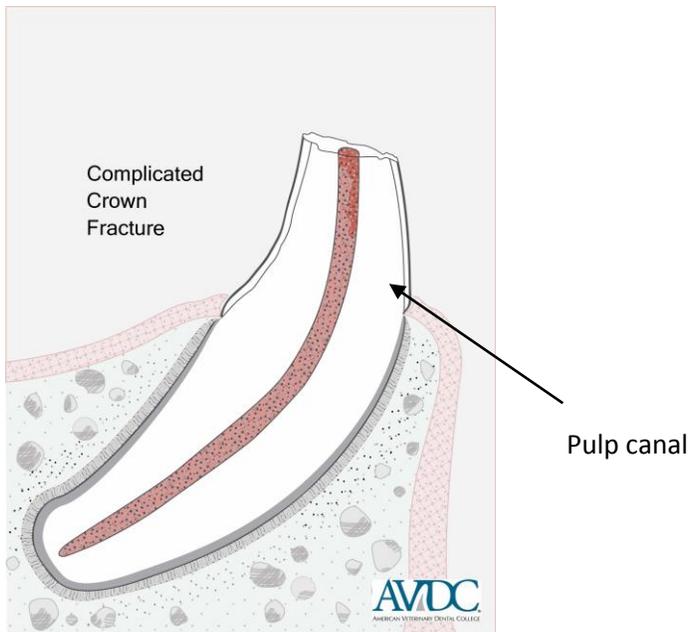
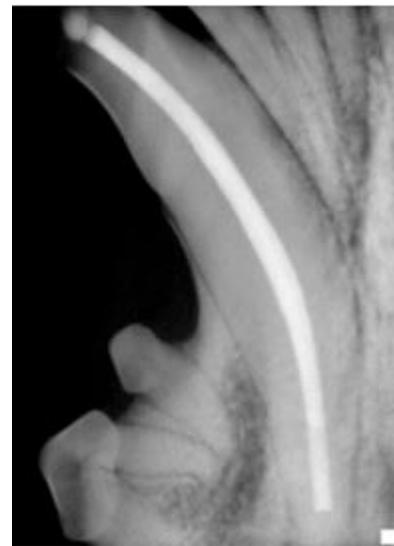


Diagram of a fractured lower canine tooth



Radiograph of a lower canine tooth after a root canal



Fractured lower canine tooth



Fractured lower canine tooth after a root canal