

ALDRICH DENTAL CARE

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Endodontic Surgery: Apicoectomy

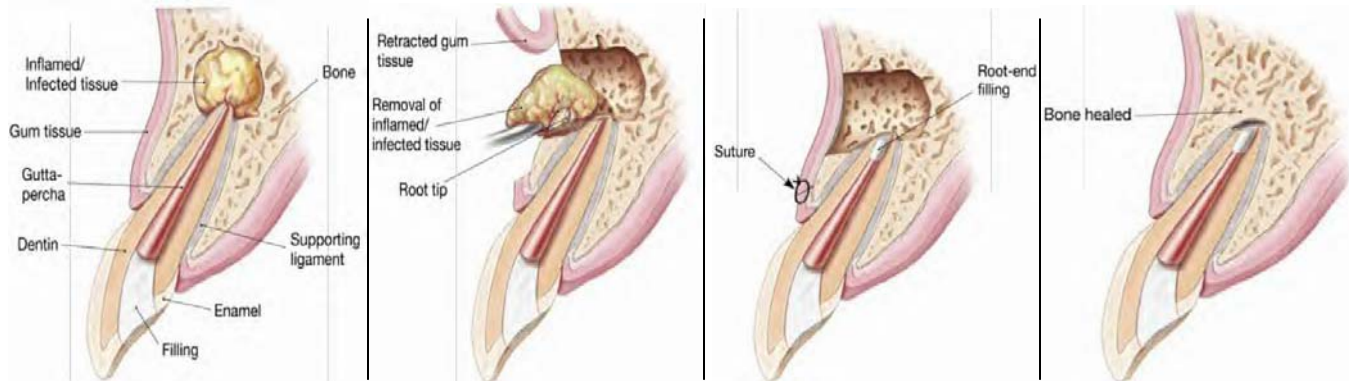
Although endodontic treatment has an extremely high rate of success, it is not 100% effective. Some teeth may not respond as expected to the root canal therapy. Sometimes, it is clear from the beginning that the root canal is not working as planned. Other times, it may be years later that the need for other treatment arises. The first and most desirable method of solving the problem is to re-treat the root canal at one or more roots. In other words, the root canal treatment is redone in a method similar to the original therapy. If it is possible to re-treat the root canal with this nonsurgical approach, this is best. If not, a different form of treatment, an *apicoectomy*, must be considered.

Teeth that have calcium deposits creating a blockage of the canal, curved roots, too narrow of a canal for the instruments used in non-surgical endodontic treatment, root resorption, persistent infection, fractures, a wide open apex, and associated cysts are some of the problems that can be corrected with an apicoectomy. There may be reasons not to perform the apicoectomy, such as surgical inaccessibility, poor or lack of bone support, short roots, or vertical fracture of the root.

Surgery may be used in diagnosis. If you have persistent symptoms but no problems appear on your x-ray, your tooth may have a tiny fracture or canal that could not be detected during non-surgical treatment. In such a case, surgery allows your endodontist to examine the entire root of your tooth, find the problem, and provide treatment. Surgery may also be performed to treat damaged root surfaces or surrounding bone.

The Procedure

The root or roots that are to receive the apicoectomy are measured with radiographs, and the approximate location of the root tip is estimated. The area to be treated is anesthetized with a local anesthetic. An incision of the gum is made over the root tip area and the gum is moved to the side. Access is made through the bone, and the tip or apex of the root can then usually be seen through this "window" in the bone. The infection is visualized and cleaned out.



The tip of the root is usually removed, and a sealing filling is placed in the remaining tip opening. The tissue is then sutured back into place. The tooth does not lose significant stability from this procedure.

There is no pain during the surgery. Local anesthetics make the procedure comfortable.

Of course, you may feel some discomfort or experience slight swelling while the incision heals. The swelling is temporary and will disappear after a few days. This is normal for any surgical procedure. Postoperative discomfort will be eliminated with anti-inflammatory and analgesic medication. Most patients return to work or other routine activities the next day. Your dentist will be happy to discuss your expected recovery time with you.

How do I know the surgery will be successful?

Your dentist is suggesting endodontic surgery because he or she believes it is the best option for saving your own natural tooth.

Of course, there are no guarantees with any surgical procedure. Your dentist will discuss your chances for success so that you can make an informed decision. When the apicoectomy is begun and the tooth can actually be seen, another type of problem may be noted. A fractured root may be the problem, and an apico would not work and the tooth would have to be removed.

What are the alternatives to endodontic surgery?

Often, the only alternative to surgery is extraction of the tooth. The extracted tooth must then be replaced with an implant, bridge, or removable partial denture to restore chewing function and to prevent adjacent teeth from shifting. Because these alternatives require surgery or dental procedures on adjacent healthy teeth, endodontic surgery is usually the most biologic and cost-effective option for maintaining your oral health.

No matter how effective modern artificial tooth replacements are—and they can be very effective—nothing is as good as a natural tooth. You’ve already made an investment in saving your tooth. The pay-off for choosing endodontic surgery could be a healthy, functioning natural tooth for the rest of your life.

This procedure can be completed by a general dentist, but it is sometimes referred to an endodontist (root canal specialist) for evaluation and treatment when unusual conditions exist.

If you have any questions about apicoectomy, please feel free to ask us.

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