

## Pulpectomy of Primary Teeth “Baby Root Canals” on Front Teeth

A deep cavity or fracture in your child’s baby tooth may extend into the nerve (pulp) of the tooth. In such cases, a pulpectomy, or “baby root canal,” is recommended to save the tooth. A pulpectomy of a baby tooth is similar to “but much less complex than” a root canal of an adult tooth. Both procedures aim to prevent the need for extraction of the tooth. While children can easily adapt to missing front teeth (in terms of speech and function), esthetics is often an issue when front teeth are lost prematurely.

A pulpectomy removes the nerve of a tooth. This often prevents the formation of an abscess. A medicated filling material is placed in the nerve space. Most often, removal of the infected nerve leaves the tooth in a weakened condition. In order to strengthen the tooth and insure success of the nerve treatment, a “cap,” is then fit onto the tooth. While stainless steel caps offer stronger restorations, they are often not preferred on front teeth for esthetic reasons. Advances in dental materials have created tooth-colored, plastic crowns which can be directly bonded to the tooth. (Be aware, however, that because these baby plastic crowns are not the same as those much more costly, lab-fabricated, porcelain crowns that are made for adult teeth, the remaining, underlying tooth structure may show through and limit the final esthetic results.) Tooth-colored caps may not be as durable as metal caps, and will therefore require more care by you and your child. Regular cleaning is needed to maintain their appearance and prevent gum irritation. Your child should avoid eating sticky or hard foods, such as candy, gum, nuts, apples, beef jerky, etc., as these foods will have a tendency to weaken the crown and increase the chances of reinfection or the crown coming off. (Harder foods can be cut into bite size pieces for your child to eat with his/her back teeth.) When the permanent teeth are ready to come in, the crown will come out on its own when the primary tooth to which it is attached is naturally lost.

Ninety percent of these pulpectomies are successful. However, 10% of teeth treated with pulpectomies still abscess. If the tooth abscesses after a pulpectomy is performed, it must be extracted. If desired, a baby partial can be made to esthetically replace the missing teeth. Proper brushing and flossing will greatly minimize the chance of abscess. Since a tooth may abscess with or without pain, it is recommended that regular six-month checkups be made in order to keep the tooth under constant observation.

### General Information

1. If local anesthetic was given to your child for the pulpectomy, watch him or her for several hours to make sure he/she is not chewing his or her cheek, tongue, or lip while they are numb.
2. Placing the caps involves working near the gumline. Your child’s gums may be slightly sensitive afterwards. Brush and floss as usual after the procedure. A clean mouth heals faster!
3. Avoid hard and sticky foods that would tend to remove the crown.

**PLEASE NOTIFY US if your child continues to complain of discomfort after 24 hours.**