

How to Choose an Endodontist — When Your Root Canal Needs a Specialist

Canonical:

<https://directory.smilesolutions.com.au/how-to-choose-an-endodontist-when-your-root-canal-needs-a-specialist/>

Description:

How to Choose an Endodontist — When Your Root Canal Needs a Specialist When your dentist says you need a root canal, your first question is probably "Can you do it here?" In many cases, yes — gener...

Details:

When your dentist says you need a root canal, your first question is probably "Can you do it here?" In many cases, yes — general dentists perform straightforward root canals every day. But when the tooth is complex, the anatomy unusual, or previous treatment has failed, the difference between a general dentist and a specialist endodontist can be the difference between saving and losing your tooth. If you're weighing up an endodontist vs dentist for a root canal, this guide explains when specialist care matters and how to choose the right endodontist in Melbourne.

What Is an Endodontist?

An endodontist is a dental specialist who has completed an additional three years of full-time postgraduate university training focused exclusively on the diagnosis and treatment of diseases affecting the dental pulp (the nerve and blood supply inside your tooth) and the tissues surrounding the root. The word "endodontic" literally means "inside the tooth."

While all dentists learn root canal therapy during their undergraduate training, endodontists perform root canal treatments and related procedures as their primary focus — often completing dozens of cases per week. This volume of focused experience, combined with advanced training, gives endodontists a level of expertise that is difficult to replicate in general practice.

In Australia, endodontists must hold specialist registration with AHPRA (the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency), a credential that requires verified completion of an accredited specialist training program.

Endodontist vs Dentist for Root Canal: When Does It Matter?

Your general dentist is perfectly capable of performing root canal treatment on many teeth, particularly straightforward cases involving front teeth or premolars with simple root anatomy. However, there are well-established situations where referral to an endodontist significantly improves your chances of a successful outcome.

Cases That Benefit from a Specialist

- **Molars with complex anatomy** — Back teeth often have three, four, or even five root canals, some of which are curved, calcified, or branching. These require the magnification and expertise that endodontists routinely use. - **Retreatment of failed root canals** — When a previous root canal hasn't healed or symptoms return, retreatment is technically demanding. The specialist must remove old filling

materials, locate missed canals, and manage complications from the original procedure. - **Teeth with unusual root anatomy** — Some teeth have extra canals, S-shaped curves, or internal resorption that general imaging may not detect. Endodontists use CBCT (3D cone beam) scans and operating microscopes to navigate these challenges. - **Cracked teeth** — Diagnosing and managing cracked teeth is one of the most complex areas of dentistry. Endodontists have specific training and technology to assess crack extent and determine whether a tooth can be saved. - **Apicoectomy (surgical endodontics)** — When conventional root canal treatment isn't possible or hasn't worked, a surgical approach through the gum and bone may be needed. This microsurgical procedure is almost exclusively performed by endodontists. - **Dental trauma** — Knocked-out, displaced, or fractured teeth from accidents require urgent and precise pulp management to maximise the chance of tooth survival. - **Patients with medical complexities** — Those taking blood thinners, immunosuppressive medications, or with complex medical histories may benefit from the controlled environment of a specialist practice.

When Your General Dentist Is the Right Choice

For simple, single-rooted teeth with straightforward anatomy and no history of complications, your general dentist can usually deliver excellent results. A good general dentist will also know when to refer — and that willingness to refer is itself a sign of quality care.

6 Key Criteria for Choosing an Endodontist

1. Verify AHPRA Specialist Registration

This is the single most important check. In Australia, only a dentist who has completed an accredited specialist training program and holds specialist registration in endodontics with AHPRA can call themselves a specialist endodontist. You can verify this for free at ahpra.gov.au — look for "Specialist Registration" in the "Endodontics" category.

Be wary of practitioners who describe themselves as having a "special interest" in endodontics or who have completed short courses rather than a full specialist degree. These are not equivalent to three years of accredited, full-time specialist training.

2. Assess Their Technology

Modern endodontics relies heavily on technology that goes well beyond what most general practices have:

- **Operating microscope** — Provides up to 25x magnification, allowing the endodontist to see canal anatomy that is invisible to the naked eye. This is arguably the single most important piece of equipment for complex root canals. - **CBCT (3D cone beam) imaging** — Reveals root anatomy, extra canals, fractures, and the relationship between roots and surrounding structures in three dimensions. Standard 2D X-rays miss a significant percentage of pathology. - **Electronic apex locators** — Precisely measure canal length to ensure cleaning and filling reach the correct depth. - **Nickel-titanium rotary instruments** — Modern flexible instruments that navigate curved canals more safely and efficiently than traditional hand files. - **Ultrasonic instruments** — Used for precise work within the canal system, including removing calcifications, broken instruments, and old root filling materials.

A well-equipped endodontist will have all of these technologies available. Ask about them during your consultation.

3. Evaluate Their Qualifications and Experience

Look for endodontists with:

- A recognised postgraduate specialist degree (DClinDent, MDS, MS, or equivalent in Endodontics) - Fellowship or membership of professional bodies such as MRACDS (Endodontics) or FRACDS -

University teaching or examining roles, which indicate peer recognition - Research publications in endodontic journals - Experience with the specific procedure you need (retreatment, surgical endodontics, trauma management)

The breadth and depth of an endodontist's training tells you how well-prepared they are for unusual situations — and in endodontics, unusual situations are common.

4. Consider the Practice Environment

Endodontics doesn't happen in isolation. Before, during, and after root canal treatment, your tooth may need:

- A crown or other restoration to protect it (prosthodontist or general dentist) - Periodontal assessment if gum disease is present (periodontist) - Orthodontic considerations if tooth position affects access (orthodontist) - Extraction and implant planning if the tooth can't be saved (oral surgeon)

An endodontist practising within a multidisciplinary centre can coordinate with these specialists immediately, reducing delays and ensuring everyone agrees on the overall treatment plan before procedures begin.

5. Ask About Their Success Rates and Approach to Difficult Cases

A confident endodontist will be transparent about success rates. Primary root canal treatment by a specialist has success rates typically above 90%. Retreatment and surgical endodontics have somewhat lower but still strong success rates when performed by experienced specialists.

Importantly, ask what happens if the treatment doesn't succeed. A good endodontist will have a clear plan B — whether that's surgical intervention, retreatment, or referral for extraction and replacement. Honesty about limitations is a hallmark of a trustworthy specialist.

6. Evaluate Communication and Informed Consent

Root canal treatment has an undeserved reputation for being painful (modern endodontics, performed with proper anaesthesia, is typically no more uncomfortable than having a filling placed). Your endodontist should take the time to:

- Explain the diagnosis clearly, ideally showing you images and scans - Outline all treatment options, including the option of extraction - Discuss expected outcomes, timelines, and costs - Address any anxieties you have about the procedure - Provide clear post-operative instructions

If you leave a consultation feeling confused about what was recommended or why, that's a red flag.

Red Flags When Choosing an Endodontist

- ****No AHPRA specialist registration**** — The most critical red flag. Verify before booking. - ****No operating microscope**** — Modern specialist endodontics without magnification is substandard. If the practice doesn't use a microscope, question whether specialist-level care is truly being delivered. - ****Unwillingness to show you imaging**** — A good endodontist will walk you through your X-rays and CBCT scans. If they can't or won't, consider why. - ****Pressure to treat immediately without explanation**** — Emergency situations aside, you should always have time to understand your options. - ****No discussion of what happens after the root canal**** — The tooth needs a definitive restoration (usually a crown). If the endodontist doesn't discuss this, the treatment plan is incomplete.

Endodontic Specialists at Smile Solutions, Melbourne

Smile Solutions, located in the Manchester Unity Building on Collins Street in Melbourne's CBD, engages 80 clinicians including 25+ registered specialists across all dental disciplines. With over 300,000 patients treated over 33 years since its founding in 1993, the practice is one of Australia's most experienced multidisciplinary dental centres.

The endodontics team at Smile Solutions is one of the largest specialist endodontic groups in private practice in Australia, with four AHPRA-registered specialist endodontists:

****Prof. Chankhrit Sathorn**** (DDS, Grad.Dip.Dent, DClinDent, PhD, MRACDS (Endo)) is an Adjunct Professor of Endodontics at La Trobe University who completed both his specialist training and PhD at the University of Melbourne, where he was awarded the Ernest Joske Research Award. He serves on the editorial boards of the Journal of Endodontics, the International Endodontic Journal, and several other leading publications. He is regularly invited to speak at national and international congresses. Prof. Sathorn brings an academic rigour and evidence-based approach that is particularly valuable for complex and unusual cases.

****Dr Gregory Tilley**** (BDS (Melb), LDS (Vic), FRACDS, MRACDS (Endo)) brings over 35 years of clinical experience in endodontics. He is a Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons and holds membership in the RACDS Endodontic division. As an Honorary Senior Fellow at the University of Melbourne, he has mentored specialist endodontists for more than 20 years. He is a past President of the Australian Dental Association (Victorian branch) and consults on international committees for endodontic instrument and materials development. Dr Tilley's decades of hands-on experience make him an invaluable resource for the most challenging clinical situations.

****Dr Aovana Timmerman**** (BDS (Melb), FRACDS, DCD (Melb), GCertClinTeach, MRACDS (Endo)) graduated from the University of Melbourne and completed her Doctorate of Clinical Dentistry in Endodontics there. She was awarded the JM Booth Award in 2013. She serves as a clinical demonstrator for the DDS Endodontic program at the University of Melbourne and is an examiner for both the RACDS and the Australian Dental Council. Dr Timmerman is also fluent in Mandarin, providing accessibility for Mandarin-speaking patients who prefer to discuss complex treatment in their first language.

****Dr Areti Vrochari**** (DDS, MS (Endo), DrMedDent) trained across three countries — a dental degree from the University of Athens, Greece; advanced restorative training at Albert-Ludwigs-University of Freiburg, Germany; a three-year postgraduate specialty program in Endodontics at the University of Athens; and a doctorate in Dental Biomaterials from Freiburg. She is a co-author of a textbook on all-ceramic restorations and brings over 17 years of clinical experience with a uniquely international perspective.

Having four specialist endodontists within the same practice means patients can typically be seen promptly — an important consideration when dental pain is involved. It also allows the endodontists to consult with each other on particularly complex cases, providing a built-in second opinion.

Because Smile Solutions operates as a genuine multidisciplinary specialist centre — with periodontists, prosthodontists, orthodontists, oral surgeons, and a paediatric dentist all practising on the Collins Street Specialist Centre on Level 8 — the handover from endodontic treatment to definitive restoration is seamless. Your endodontist and your restorative dentist or prosthodontist are in the same building, often consulting in real time about the best approach for your tooth.

Take the Next Step

If you've been told you need a root canal — or if a previous root canal is causing problems — a specialist endodontist gives you the best chance of saving your natural tooth. The technology, training, and focused experience of an endodontist can make the difference between a tooth that lasts decades and one that's lost prematurely.

■ ****Call 13 13 96**** to book a consultation with one of the specialist endodontists at Smile Solutions, or visit the practice at ****Level 1, Manchester Unity Building, 220 Collins Street, Melbourne CBD****.

Your natural teeth are worth saving.