

Meriden

# Root canals get a bum rap — according to endodontists

By Steven Scarpa  
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**MERIDEN** — One should never underestimate the fear the prospect of a root canal generates.

Jennifer Rose, a secretary at Advanced Endodontics of Connecticut, has seen patients arrive with a phalanx of moral support; one terrified adult woman brought her mother, grandmother and aunt along with her.

"People hear root canals and they are instantly afraid from the stories they've heard," Rose said.

Dr. Joel Chasen, an endodontist, recalled working with one man who woke up every five minutes in a panic the night before his root canal procedure. He ended up falling asleep while Chasen worked on him. "So many people have the fear that it is going to be an excruciatingly painful experience ... there is minimal trauma," he said.

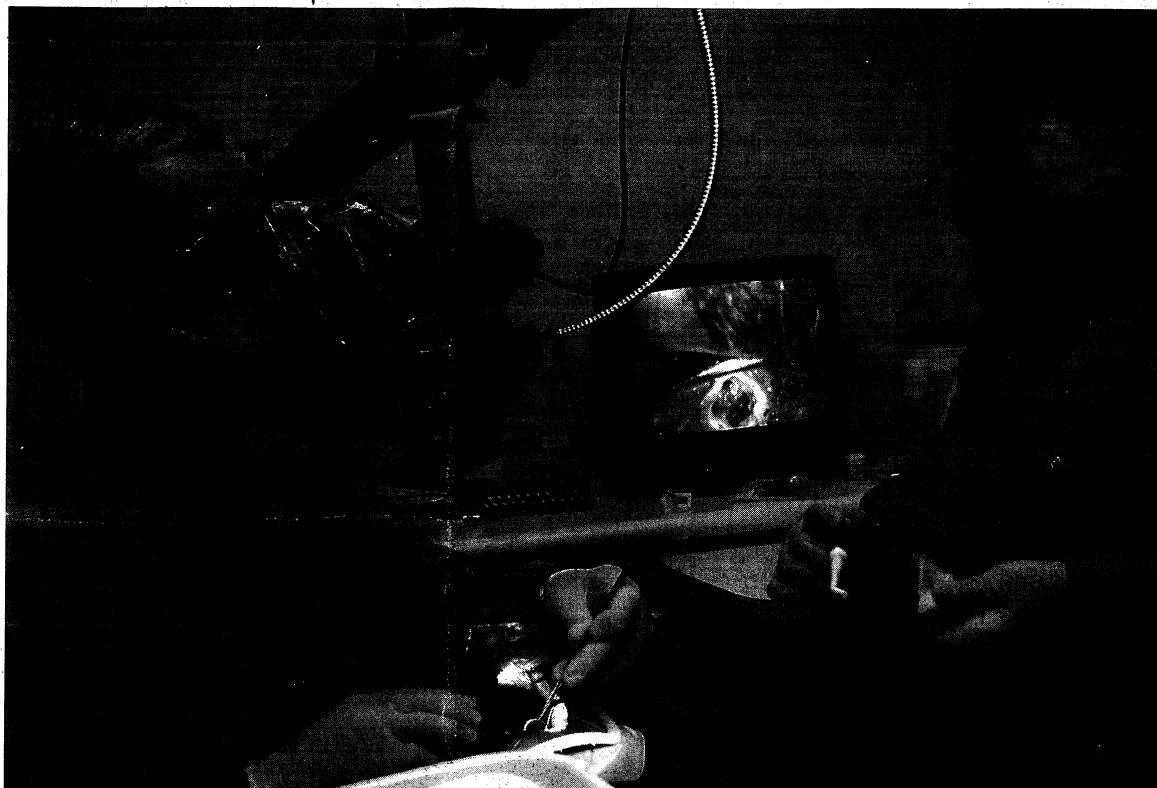
Even the phrase "root canal" connotes certain medical terrors — digging, twisting and pulling through bone. Fortunately for everyone involved, that is simply not the case. "They've heard incorrect information about their treatment," said Janet Johnson, another secretary at Advanced Endodontics.

That's the message endodontists want to convey during Root Canal Awareness Week. Chasen, who works with his father Kenneth in the practice, is concerned that some people are refusing to have the procedure based on myths and misunderstandings.

"There is no reason why someone can't be completely numb and not feel anything when you are working on them," Joel Chasen said.

"We feel we can control (the procedure) very well at this point," said Dr. Shepard Goldstein, president-elect of the American Association of Endodontists. "If I have 20 patients, 19 can be without any discomfort and the one can be managed. Root canals got a bad rap over the years. It is always compared to the worst things on earth."

There are also practical medical considerations, as well. Ac-



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Dr. Kenneth Chasen, an endodontist, or root canal specialist, examines a tooth (seen on the monitor) in patient William Gairing of Naugatuck at Advanced Endodontics of Connecticut, Thursday. The Connecticut affiliate of the American Association of Endodontists are celebrating the first-ever "Root Canal Awareness Week," in an effort to dispel myths about the procedure. At the right is dental assistant Sandy Luca.

According to the American Association of Endodontists, root canals save more than 17 million teeth a year. In addition, a December 2005 study in the American Journal of Preventative Medicine found the tooth loss was associated with a greater risk of heart disease. Chasen himself participated in a 2006 study that postulated endodontic disease, which a root canal corrects, and coronary heart disease.

A root canal become neces-

sary when an untended cavity gets so deep bacteria settles in the pulp inside the tooth, an area filled with blood vessels and nerve endings. If bacteria damages the pulp, the tooth begins to die. In relatively extreme cases, when bacteria completely kills the inside of the tooth; it starts to move into the bone around the tooth, rotting the area and causing abscesses.

Joel Chasen said a root canal is a careful procedure where the endodontist uses a combi-

nation of medicine, chemicals and hair-thin instruments to follow the line of the root and clean out the rotten area. The empty area is then filled with gutta percha, a rubber-like compound that seals and protects the tooth.

Any bacteria in the gum line will likely be destroyed by the rich blood vessels in the area, something that can't happen inside the walls of the tooth. "Antibiotics can't be a solution because you have to eliminate the

source of the problem," Joel Chasen said.

Extraction could be another solution to the immediate problem, but it creates a host of other issues not the least of which are aesthetics and loss of functionality.

Wethersfield resident Karen Landry spent an hour in the chair Thursday morning getting a 17-year-old root canal redone. She had developed a painful blister on the roof of his mouth as a result of the bacte-

ria that had settled in the old procedure.

Thanks to use of precise instruments and a highly powered microscope, Joel Chasen found another untreated canal in a back molar.

"This is much better than my first root canal," Landry said through a local anesthetic laced voice.

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