

TEMPORARY RIP-OFF?

Dear Dr. McCrummen: My dentist just put in a filling that she called a "temporary filling". This sounds like a major rip-off to me. Why didn't she just fill it and get it over with? Now I have to go back later, get another shot, and pay more for a permanent filling. What could be the reason for this? D.K.

Temporary fillings are used for several reasons:

One reason is to insulate and sedate the tooth to give it a chance to heal. A tooth heals on the inside by adding more dentin to protect the nerves and blood vessels in the root canals. This can save you over \$2000 by helping prevent the need of root canal therapy and a crown, or the loss of a tooth. Added insulation helps keep you comfortable while it heals, and reduces the shock of hot and cold when the tooth is struggling to survive. Often 6 months is needed for repair, or to get a better idea if the tooth might survive. After it heals, a permanent filling can be placed in the tooth, sometimes over a permanent medication called a "pulp cap".

A temporary filling should be placed if the tooth is not expected to survive, or definitely needs root canal therapy. A large hole must be put in the center of the tooth to do the root canal treatment so it is better to put a hole in the temporary than to damage a new permanent filling, which would need to be replaced. A temporary filling is usually less expensive than a permanent filling, so it can save you money.

Another reason to use a temporary-filling is that the dentist may not have the time necessary to rebuild the tooth to the best of their ability. If a person is worked in to the already busy schedule between patients due to an emergency, or the problem was unexpectedly complex and requires more time and other patients have to wait or reschedule, a temporary filling may help everyone. Most people are patient but no one likes to wait very long for their pre-scheduled appointment. Unexpected complexities and emergencies are the main reason people have to wait.

If you ever feel you are being "ripped-off", communication, understanding or trust is lacking. If you are happy with your dental team ask questions and be sure that you understand and are comfortable with the answers. A dental practice grows from referral of friends and families of happy patients, and we want all of our patients to be happy with the care they receive. Trust your dentist to do the very best for you.