

Equine Dental Care

Equine dental care is essential to your horse's health. Periodic oral exams and regular maintenance (floating) are necessary for a number of reasons. We have modified the horse's diet and eating patterns due to domestication and confinement and are also demanding more from them starting at a much younger age from a performance standard. Proper dental care will make your horse's mouth more comfortable and help them to utilize feed more efficiently, resulting in better performance and potentially longer lives.

Horses evolved as grazing animals. The front teeth (incisors) function to shear off forage. The cheek teeth (premolars and molars) have wide, grveled surfaces to grind feed before it is swallowed.

Horses have anywhere from 36-44 teeth as an adult. Starting before birth until around the age of 5, teeth are erupting and they are losing deciduous (baby) teeth that are replaced by permanent teeth.

Common dental problems in the horse include:

- Sharp enamel points from cheek teeth causing lacerations of the cheeks and tongue
- Retained deciduous teeth
- Wolf teeth causing discomfort when using a bit
- Hooks forming on the upper and lower cheek teeth
- Lost or broken teeth
- Uneven bite planes
- Excessively worn teeth
- Abnormally long teeth
- Infected teeth
- Misalignment
- Periodontal disease

Horses with dental problems may or may not show obvious signs of pain or irritation. Some are able to adapt to the discomfort better than others. This is why periodic dental exams are so important. Signs of dental problems include:

- Loss of feed from mouth while eating, difficulty chewing and hyper salivation
- Weight loss
- Undigested food particles in manure

- Head tilt/ tossing , fighting the bit
- Poor performance such as failing to turn or stop, possibly even bucking
- Foul odor from nostrils or mouth
- Nasal discharge or swelling of face

Oral examinations should be an essential part of yearly exams performed by a veterinarian. Each exam provides the opportunity to perform routine preventative care. The end result is a healthier, happier horse.