



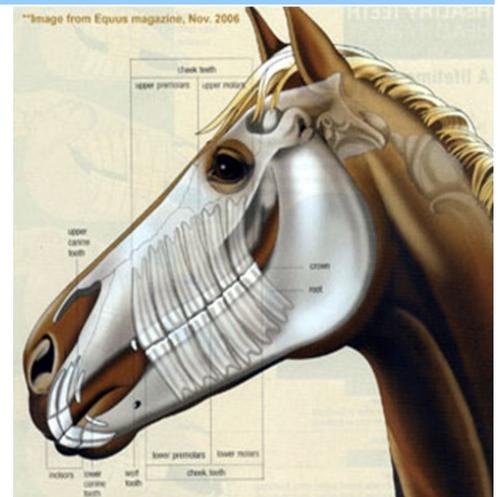
Equine Veterinary Services

Understanding the need for Regular Equine Dental Care

Introduction:

Before we can understand why our horses need regular dental care to keep them healthy and performing at their best we need to understand a few basic facts about their teeth, and the ways in which they differ from our own. Horses like humans have two sets of teeth, baby or milk teeth and adult teeth. Human adult teeth remain the same shape and size through out our life, and because we mostly eat nutrient rich soft food they do not wear away. Horses on the other hand evolved to eat very large quantities of poor quality rough fibrous food which wears away the top grinding surface of their teeth as they chew. A horses teeth would be ground right down to nothing with in a few years if they did not continue to erupt (or grow) out of the jaw as time goes by.

An adult horses teeth are therefore four to five inches long and most of the tooth is buried in the bone of the jaw, slowly erupting to the surface through out the life of the horse. It is this continual growth of a horses teeth that can lead to the development of a variety of problems at different ages, especially when the teeth are not wearing down evenly. Hooks and sharp edges of enamel can form on the teeth which affect the horses ability to both eat and to respond to a bridle. Treating such problems early is better and easier for the horse and can result in a much better ride. For this reason we recommend that horses should have an annual dental check up. During the examination other potentially more serious problems such as fractures and infected cavities can be detected and treated appropriately. It is true that if a horse lives long enough eventually some of it's teeth will grow out completely, so older animals, even if they aren't being ridden, should also have regular dental examinations.



Normal Equine Teeth

Wolf Teeth and Caps:

Horses have a set of twelve teeth (incisors) at the front of the jaw. These are used for cutting grass when they eat. Then there is a long gap that has no teeth (the bit usually sits in this space). The cheek teeth (premolars and molars) are used for crushing and grinding up food before swallowing. 'Wolf teeth' are small premolars that sometimes erupt into the 'space'. They are equally common in male and female horses, and more likely to occur on the upper jaw. They have no function and, because they can interfere with the horses bit contact and make it difficult to rasp the other teeth, they are often removed.

Like humans, young horses also loose their deciduous teeth late in their second year. These 'baby teeth' or 'Caps' are generally pushed out naturally as the adult teeth emerge, but they can cause discomfort if they are loose but still attached, necessitating their removal.

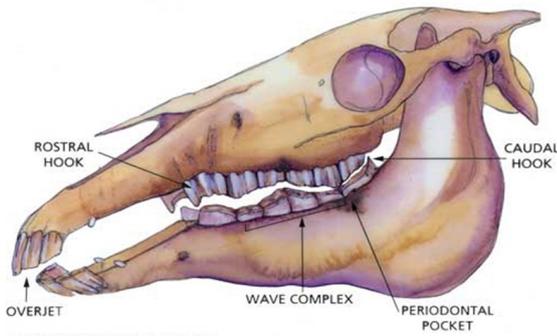


Wolf Tooth and Caps

Other Dental Problems:

A thorough dental examination can only be achieved using a gag which is placed into the horses mouth to keep it open. Because not all horses are comfortable with this procedure we recommend that they are sedated before any examination begins. As veterinary surgeons we are licensed to use safe and effective sedatives that will take the stress out of doing a flotation for both you and your horses. Other common dental problems that may be diagnosed by your veterinary surgeon during a thorough examination include hooks, sharp edges, infections of the pulp cavity of a tooth, cracked teeth or slab fractures, traumatic injuries from kicks and bites, penetrating foreign bodies and tumours.





Parrot Mouth Malocclusion

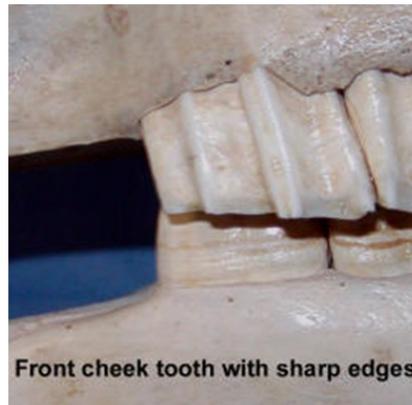
hook. If these hooks are left unresolved they will reduce the ability of the horse to effectively grind its food. Floating or rasping the teeth regularly will avoid these problems. Hooks and sharp enamel edges left in the mouth can cause lesions on the tongue and cheeks which result in the horse dropping its food and responding poorly to a bridle.

The Bit Seat or Performance Float:

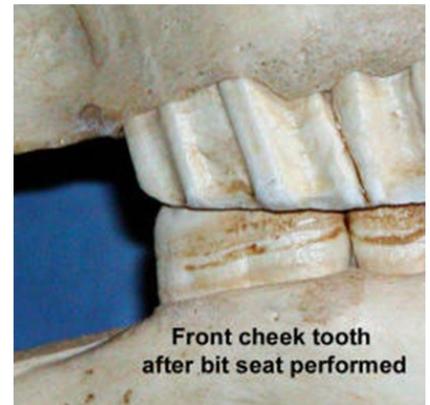
When tension is put on a bridle the bit moves back in the mouth bunching up the bulky tissues of the cheeks. This soft tissue can easily be damaged by sharp edges or hooks on the front cheek teeth resulting in pain for the horse, who will toss his head and respond poorly to the bridle.

A bit seat entails rounding off the sharp edges on the first teeth to create a small groove in which the bit can make contact with the teeth without causing any trauma to the surrounding soft tissues.

Whilst not all head tossing can be cured by dentistry regular early attention to your horses teeth can markedly improve his performance. A bit seat in a young horse just entering training may help to prevent them from developing bad habits as they mature.



Front cheek tooth with sharp edges



Front cheek tooth after bit seat performed

Are your horses overdue for a dental examination?

Many problems under saddle can be dental related:

- Head tossing, tilting the head while riding or difficulty bending.
- Difficulty in picking up the canter or performing flying changes.
- Refusal to collect, bucking, or a gaping mouth.
- Difficulty in getting the horse 'on the bit' (especially if the horse tends to go behind the bit).
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Signs of Advanced Dental problems:

- Eats slowly, does not finish food, reluctance to eat.
- Loss of condition, dull coat, weight loss.
- Quidding (horse drops partially chewed food whilst eating).
- Turning head to one side while chewing.
- Excessive salivation, blood in the saliva.
- Foul smell from mouth or nose.
- Draining sinus from the jaw.
- Discharge from one nostril.
- Facial swelling.
- Undigested food in the manure.