

Dental Information and Recommendations

“Don’t smile at me, Horse!”

Horses with dental problems may be smiling! A smile may be an indication of improper oval chewing instead of circular chewing. A horse may experience mouth pain and irritation or they may adapt to their discomfort and show no noticeable signs at all. That’s why a routine dental exam and regular maintenance are essential to your horse’s health. The process of rasping or filing a horse’s teeth is known as “floating”. Floating removes sharp enamel points, creates a more even chewing surface and insures that incisors are kept at a desirable length. Old fashioned manual floating is done with hand tools and is not as thorough and effective as a power float. New methods of power floating, performed by an experienced equine practitioner, can prevent or correct most equine dental problems. Oral exams should always be included in your horse’s yearly health evaluations, no matter what their age, young or old.

“Hay, I need some attention!!”

Indications of dental problems include:

- Riding behavior problems, poor performance, failing to turn or stop, even bucking.
- Bit chewing, fighting the bit or resisting bridling; head tossing or tilting; tongue lolling.
- Loss of feed from mouth while eating or excessive salivation.
- Large or undigested feed particles in manure.
- Foul odor or traces of blood from the mouth.
- Nasal discharge, with or without a foul odor; swelling of the face, jaw or mouth tissues.
- Loss of body condition.

“Open wide!!”

Your horse’s mouth will be evaluated in several ways:

- The tongue is pulled to each side of the mouth to evaluate the wear of the premolars and molars.
- The TMJ or Jaw Joint is palpated to determine if there is pain or discomfort in or around the joint. This may explain abnormal chewing, riding problems or a particular side that may need to be investigated further.
- The front teeth are held together to evaluate if one side is deviating further than the other. Hooks can also develop which can prevent side to side motion.
- Sedation is used to allow the veterinarian to completely evaluate and treat your horse quickly and safely. A full mouth speculum is placed in the mouth allowing for a full visual and digital palpation of each tooth and the soft tissue structures in the mouth.

After examination of all oral surfaces, power floating begins:

- A dremel tool is used to round the first two upper and lower premolars to provide your horse with a “bit seat”, allowing the bit to fit better.
- A pneumatic dental tool is then used to file off high or rough points in the mouth. We prefer this type of power equipment because it doesn’t cause a lot of heat in or around the teeth while filing. Too much heat can lead to permanent damage or death of the tooth root.

“From baby teeth to adult teeth, keep those pearly whites in shape!”

Horses are grazing animals, with teeth adapted for that purpose. Like humans, they get two sets of teeth:

- Baby teeth, erupting at birth/8 mo., start being replaced by adult teeth at about 2 ½ yrs. old.
- By age 5, most permanent teeth are in, all 36 to 40 of them, growing until about 20 yrs. old.
- Wolf teeth, small teeth located in the front of the cheek teeth and rarely in the lower jaw, are routinely removed to prevent pain or interference from a bit.
- Any age horse headed for training, needs a dental exam to prevent teeth related problems.
- Maintaining an even bite plane during a horse’s teen years, ensures good alignment for life.