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If left unchecked, these hooks can become long enough to penetrate the hard or soft palate. Small hooks can be removed by floating. Longer hooks are usually removed with cutters or a dental burr.

WOLF TEETH

Wolf teeth are very small teeth located in front of the second premolar and do not have longer roots that set them firmly in the jawbone. They rarely appear in the lower jaw. A horse may have one, two or no wolf teeth. While not all wolf teeth are troublesome, equine dentists routinely remove them to prevent pain or interference from the bit.

THE AGE FACTOR

The age of a horse affects the degree of attention and frequency of dental care required. Consider these points:

- Horses going into training for the first time, especially 2 and 3 year olds, need a comprehensive dental check-up. Teeth should be floated to remove any sharp points and checked for retained caps. Caps should be removed if they have not been shed. This should be done before training begins to prevent training problems related to sharp teeth.
- Even yearlings have been found to have enamel points sharp enough to damage cheek and tongue tissue. Floating may improve feed efficiency and make them more comfortable.
- Horses aged between 2 and 5 may require more frequent dental exams than older horses. Deciduous teeth tend to be softer than permanent teeth and may develop sharp enamel points more quickly. Also there is an extraordinary amount of dental maturation during this period. Twenty-four teeth will be shed and replaced during this time, with the potential for 12 to 16 teeth to be erupting simultaneously. Horses in this age group should be examined twice yearly, and necessary procedures should be performed.
- Even the best dental program may not be able to solve or alleviate all of a young horse's teething discomfort.

- Mature horses should get a thorough dental examination at least once a year, whether or not there are signs of tooth problems.
- It is important to maintain an even bite plane during a horse's middle teens in order to ensure a level grinding surface into its 20s. If you wait until the horse is in its 20s, the surfaces may be worn excessively and/or unevenly, and since the teeth are no longer erupting at this age, alignment may be impossible.

DEVELOPING GREATER AWARENESS

- If a horse starts behaving abnormally, dental problems should be considered as a cause
- Teeth should be floated and maintained at least annually by a certified equine dentist
- Wolf teeth are extracted from performance horses to prevent interference with the bit
- Sedatives and analgesics can relax your horse and keep it more comfortable during dental procedures. Such drugs should be administered by a veterinarian
- Loose teeth are generally unhealthy teeth. If your equine practitioner finds a loose tooth, he/she will be likely to extract it as this will reduce the chances of infection and other problems
- Canine teeth are usually clipped and filed smooth to prevent interference with the bit.
- Depending on the condition of your horses teeth it may be important for your equine dental practitioner to give your horse more than one treatment to get the mouth in a balanced working order.
- It is important to catch dental problems early. The remedy will be simpler if detected early.
- High level performance horses should have their teeth checked a least twice a year

MORE SERIOUS DENTAL PROBLEMS

Serious dental conditions can develop, such as infections of the teeth and gums, extremely long hooks on the molars, lost or fractured teeth and many other problems. Some dental conditions may require surgical treatment by a veterinary surgeon. Your equine dental practitioner can recommend the best treatment for you to follow.

EQUINE DENTAL CARE

The Importance of Maintaining the Health of your Horse's Mouth



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Routine dental care is essential to your horse's health. Periodic examinations and regular maintenance, such as floating, are especially necessary today for a number of reasons:

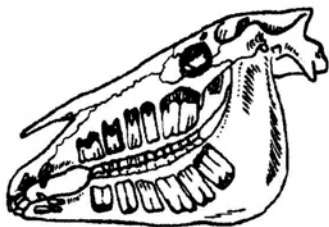
- We have modified the horse's diet and eating patterns through domestication and confinement
- We demand more from our performance horses, beginning at a younger age, than ever before
- We often select breeding animals without regard to dental considerations

Proper dental care has its rewards. Your horse will be more comfortable, will utilize its feed more efficiently, may perform better, and may even live longer.

THE HORSE'S MOUTH

Horses evolved as grazing animals, and their teeth are perfectly adapted for that purpose. The forward teeth, known as incisors, function to shear off forage. The cheek teeth, including the molars and premolars with their wide, flat gravelled surfaces, easily grind the feed to a mash before it is swallowed.

Like humans, horses get two sets of teeth in their lifetime. The baby teeth, or incisors, are temporary. The first deciduous incisors may erupt before the foal is born. The last baby teeth come in when the horse is about 8 months of age. These teeth begin to be replaced by adult teeth around 2 ½ . By age 5, most horses have their full complement of permanent teeth. An adult male horse has 40 permanent teeth. A mare may have between 36-40, because mares are less likely to have canine (bridle) teeth.



The following chart shows the approximate ages at which different teeth erupt. By referring to it, you may detect potential abnormalities of your own horse, associated with teething.

Deciduous (Baby Teeth)

1 st incisors (centrals)	Birth or 1 st week
2 nd incisors (intermediate)	4-6 weeks
3 rd incisors (corners)	6-9 months
1 st 2 nd & 3 rd premolars (cheek teeth)	Birth or first 2 wk for all premolars

Permanent (Adult Teeth)

1 st incisors (centrals)	2 ½ years
2 nd incisors (intermediates)	3 ½ years
3 rd incisors (corners)	4 ½ years
Canines (bridle)	4-5 years
Wolf Teeth (1 st premolars)	5-6 months
2 nd premolars (1 st cheek teeth)	2 ½ years
3 rd premolars (2 nd cheek teeth)	3 years
4 th premolars (3 rd cheek teeth)	4 years
1 st molars (4 th cheek teeth)	9-12 months
2 nd molars (5 th cheek teeth)	2 years
3 rd molars (6 th cheek teeth)	3 ½ -4 years

COMMON DENTAL PROBLEMS

Horses may suffer from many dental problems. The most common include:

- Sharp enamel points forming on cheek teeth, causing lacerations of the cheeks & tongue
- Retained caps (deciduous teeth not shed)
- Discomfort caused by bit contact with the wolf teeth
- Hooks forming on the upper and lower cheek teeth
- Long and/or sharp canine teeth interfering with the insertion or removal of the bit
- Lost and/or broken teeth
- Abnormal or uneven bite planes
- Excessively worn teeth
- Abnormally long teeth
- Infected teeth and/or gums
- Misalignment/poor apposition (can be due to congenital defects or injury)
- Periodontal (gum) disease

RECOGNIZING DENTAL PROBLEMS

Horses with dental problems may show obvious signs such as pain or irritation, or they may show no noticeable signs at all. That is due to the fact that some horses simply adapt to their discomfort. For this reason, periodic dental examinations are essential.

Indications of dental problems include:

- Loss of feed from mouth while eating, difficulty with chewing, or excessive salivation
- Loss of body condition

- Large or undigested feed particles (long stems or whole grain) in manure
- Head tilting or tossing, bit chewing, tongue lolling, fighting the bit, or resisting bridling
- Poor performance, such as lugging on the bit, failing to turn or stop, or even bucking
- Foul odour from mouth or nostrils, or traces of blood from the mouth
- Nasal discharge or swelling of the face, jaw, or mouth tissues

Oral exams should be an essential part of an annual physical examination by a certified equine dentist. Every dental exam provides the opportunity to perform routine preventative dental maintenance. The end result is a healthier, more comfortable horse.

FLOATING AND PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE

The process of rasping or filing a horse's teeth is known as floating. This is the most common dental procedure equine dentists do on horses. Floating removes sharp enamel points and can create a more even bite plane. It also helps keep incisors and cheek teeth at a desirable length. When turned out to pasture, horses browse almost continuously, picking up dirt and grit in the process. This, plus the silicate in grass, wears down the teeth. Stabled horses, however, may not give their teeth the same workout. Feedings are more apt to be scheduled, not continuous, and to include processed grains and hays. Softer feeds require less chewing. This may allow the horse's teeth to become excessively long or to wear unevenly. Adult horse's teeth erupt throughout their life and are worn off by chewing.

Unfortunately, cheek teeth tend to develop sharp enamel points even under normal grazing conditions. Because the horse's lower jaw is narrower than its upper jaw and the horse grinds its feed with a sideways motion, sharp points tend to form along the edges. Points form on the cheek side of the upper teeth and the tongue side of the lower teeth. These points should be floated to prevent them from cutting the cheeks and tongue. Floating is especially important in horses who have lost a tooth, or whose teeth are in poor apposition and do not fit together well. Normally contact with the apposing tooth keeps biting surfaces equal. When teeth are out of alignment, hooks can form