

Does Your Horse Need to Visit the Veterinary Dentist?

The mouth is the start of the digestive tract!

Horses' teeth grow continually throughout life. The front teeth pinch grass from the ground and the cheek teeth, (premolars and molars) work in a circular motion to grind grass, grains and hay into smaller pieces ready for digestion. Horses only have one shot at getting the food ground up correctly as they cannot vomit or regurgitate like a cow or dog, this means what goes down stays down and if it is not well processed it makes the nutrients in food less available or at worst it can cause a blockage and subsequent colic.

What can go wrong with teeth?

As the teeth wear, sharp points develop on them that can cause ulcers on the cheeks and tongue and can cause pinching of the cheeks between the bit and the first cheek teeth whilst being ridden. In addition, if your horses' teeth are not perfectly in alignment, Excessive Transverse Ridges can form along the arcade of cheek teeth which act as a wedge that forces teeth in the opposing arcade to be pushed. This creates a gap which allows food to get trapped and cause gingivitis and periodontal disease which is inflammation of the gums and tissues that support the teeth. This causes significant

mouth pain and can lead to abscesses and loose teeth that need to be extracted.

Your Horses' Veterinary Dentist

Veterinarians that have undergone further training in equine dentistry are the best people to be your horses' dentist. A specialized gag, a light, dental mirror, specialized hand tools and a safe diamond coated powertool are used to visualize every surface of the teeth and then give them a superior finish. Veterinarians are the only people that are legally allowed to use sedation and local anaesthetic and prescribe for drugs for your horse. By using the right drugs dental exams are thorough, safe for handlers, tooth removal is painless and antibiotics can be prescribed if needed.

Additionally if x-rays are needed to assess a rotten tooth, your vet can do that too.

As most of your horses teeth cannot be seen, you may not realize that something is wrong until your horse starts showing symptoms as outlined below.

Riders may notice:

- Avoiding correct head carriage
- pulls on the bit
- tosses their head
- holds mouth open
- tongue out or salivates

refusing to be bridled
unexplained lameness in front
chewing of the bit
bucking or rearing!

Advanced dental disease symptoms:

dropping clumps of feed “quidding”
weight loss
Slow eating
Frequent mouth washing
Painful facial expressions or anxiety at the feed bin
Not eating grain
Manure has whole grains
Manure has hay or grass fibers longer than 10mm.

Severe dental disease symptoms:

Drooling
Foul smelling breath
Face or jaw swellings or lumps
Nostril discharge
Poor body condition but well fed
Suffers choke
Suffers colic
Suffers diarrhoea

**If any of the above symptoms
occur in your horse,
they need to see a veterinary dentist!**

Prevention is the best Cure

Many older horse dental problems are created because the horse did not receive adequate dental care as a youngster. Longstanding problems are difficult to correct so regular dental visits at a young age will help prevent this from occurring.

To avoid the development of dental problems horses should see their veterinary dentist every 6 months from 1 year of age before their riding careers start and needs to be continued through retirement. Performance horse riders often find dental checks every 3 months keep their horses at their best.

The Murray Bridge Vet Clinic has several trained veterinary horse dentists who are passionate about keeping your horses' mouth pain-free and will help you design a dental plan for your horse, call us and book them in for a 'dental'.