



Equine Dental Care

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Horses are living longer lives now than ever before. Why is that? A major factor is the advancement of equine dental care. Modern equine dentistry has dramatically improved quality of life for the horse. Appropriate dental care is critical in maintaining proper body condition score, reducing the incidence of colic, improving digestion, and maximizing performance. Horses have hypsodont teeth, which mean they continue to erupt through their entire life. Additionally, the upper teeth are set wider apart than the lower teeth which can cause sharp points to form on the outside of the upper cheek teeth and the inside of the lower cheek teeth due to lack of opposition. Between the ages of 2 and 5 horses are erupting adult teeth and losing deciduous teeth (baby teeth or caps). These caps can become retained if not appropriately shed and cause pain and irritation to the young horse. It is important to have an oral exam and float done twice a year in this early stage of life. Wolf teeth typically erupt around 6-12 months of age and are found in 70% of horses. If they cause a problem with training they are typically extracted before the age of 2, though this does not occur with every horse. Appropriate dental care and prophylaxis at a young age can set a horse up for success in the future with less dental pathology.

After the age of 5, most horses can be floated once a year to keep sharp points from causing ulcers in the mouth and to prevent hooks from forming. Many horse owners believe that if their horse is not dropping feed and is of good body condition score then the teeth are not an issue. Horses are great at hiding pain and severe underlying dental disease can be found in the most obese horses. Clinical signs that warrant an immediate examination include: foul smelling breath, swelling on the face, quidding, dropping feed, difficulty eating, colic, choke, nasal discharge, head shaking, and difficulty with the bit. An annual oral examination by your veterinarian is essential in keeping your horse healthy and at

peak performance. A veterinarian is able to do a complete examination while sedated to detect foreign bodies in the mouth, diseased teeth, ulcers, malocclusions, and many other oral abnormalities. Teeth are a nonrenewable resource and proper care is essential to the horse's longevity.