

**A Guide To Equine Dental Care (from Alberta Veterinary Medical Assoc Website [http://www.avma.ab.ca/animal\\_health/horsehealth1.htm](http://www.avma.ab.ca/animal_health/horsehealth1.htm))**

Like humans, horses get two sets of teeth in their lifetime. The baby teeth (also called deciduous teeth) are only temporary. Normally, a horse will have a full set of baby teeth by the age of 9 months. These teeth will start to be replaced around the age of 2 1/2 years. By the age of 5 most horses have their full complement of permanent teeth.

Veterinarians recommend that your horse's teeth be examined at least once per year - this applies whether or not there are any manifested signs of dental problems. Horses with dental problems may show obvious signs such as pain or irritation or they may show no noticeable signs at all.

Some horses simply adapt to their discomfort. For this reason, periodic exams by a veterinarian are important. Some visible indicators of dental problems include:

- Loss of feed while eating
- Excessive salivation, slobbering
- Difficulty with chewing
- Long stems or whole grain particles in manure
- Resistance to bridling
- Fighting the bit
- Nasal discharge
- Foul odor from mouth or nostrils
- Swelling of the face, jaw or mouth tissues

#### **Preventative Maintenance**

The process of rasping or filing a horse's teeth is known as "Floating". This is the most common dental procedure Veterinarians perform on horses. Floating removes sharp enamel points and can create a more even bite plane.

Removing wolf teeth is also a common procedure although not all wolf teeth are troublesome. Wolf teeth are small teeth that commonly erupt in the upper jaw. Veterinarians routinely remove these teeth from riding aged horses to prevent pain or interference from a bit. Removal of the wolf teeth also allows the veterinarian to properly float the cheek teeth.

#### **Age Factor**

The age of a horse can have a profound impact on the degree and frequency of dental care required. Horses aged 2 - 5 may require more frequent dental exams than aged horses. Deciduous teeth tend to be softer than permanent teeth and may develop sharp enamel points more quickly. There is also an extraordinary amount of activity in a horse's mouth during its first 5 years - 24 teeth will be shed and replaced during this time with the potential for 12 - 16 teeth to be erupting simultaneously.

#### **Rewards**

There are many rewards to proper equine dental care. Your horse will be healthier and more comfortable, will utilize feed more efficiently, may perform better and may even live longer.

#### **How Horse's Teeth Develop**

##### **Deciduous (baby) Teeth**

Fully developed by the age of approximately 9 months.

##### **Permanent Teeth**

- Wolf teeth 5 - 6 month
- 1st molars 9 - 12 months
- 2nd molars 2 years
- 3rd molars 3.5 - 4 years
- 1st incisors 2.5 years
- 2nd incisors 3.5 years
- 3 incisors 4.5 years
- Canines 4 - 5 years
- 1st premolars 2.5 years
- 2nd premolars 3 years
- 3rd premolars 4 years

Veterinarians recommend yearly dental exams for all horses. Consult your Veterinarian for more information on your horse's equine dental care.