

# Routine Dentistry

**Just like humans, horses require regular dental checks and treatment throughout their lives. We recommend 6-12 monthly checks of your horse's mouth depending on their age, dental anatomy and if they have had dental issues in the past.**

## When should dental checks start

Dental checks should start in a young horse at about 3 years old. Horses have 36 deciduous 'baby' teeth that are lost between the ages of 1.5 years and 4.5 years, so it is a good idea to ask us to check their erupting teeth to make sure there are no problems developing.

Sometimes the baby teeth can become stuck above the teeth below so, occasionally, these will need taking out. It's best to start dental checks when your horse is young to get them used to the instruments and what happens, rather than wait until there is an issue and your horse's mouth is already sore. Give us a call to book in for a dental exam.

## Wolf Teeth

Wolf teeth are present in around 40% of horses and it is debatable whether or not these should be removed. It depends on where in the mouth they are situated, if they will be prone to fracture, as well as on the owner's personal preference. We are more than happy to discuss this with you and, if needed or desired, will remove these teeth under sedation with pain relief.



It is vital to have your horse's teeth checked to ensure no sharp enamel points have developed and are not causing any oral pain.

Horse's teeth erupt continuously throughout their lives and are worn down by the normal action of chewing.

A normal, natural diet for a horse would include rough long fibre. The chewing of this type of material is different to the diet we often feed our horses who are in work or being ridden. Hard feed and soft hay or haylage do not require the same chewing forces and so, wear of the horse's teeth can be different to how it would occur in the wild.

By placing a bit in the horse's mouth and asking them to work, we are placing different pressures on their mouth than would happen naturally. This can affect the rate of wear on their teeth and create dental problems that need sorting quickly, so as not to cause further, more serious issues.

These are all good reasons for making sure your horse has regular dental checks with rasping and correction of sharp enamel points and overgrowths.



**Give us a call to book in for a dental exam.**

### What is normal?

A normal adult horse's mouth is made up of 4 arcades of 6 teeth, 3 of these 6 teeth are premolars and 3 are molars. These teeth act as a single grinding unit. They should be tightly grouped together and come into direct contact with the opposite arcade in the mouth.

If there are extra teeth in any arcade or missing teeth, then the tooth may not have an opposing tooth to grind against. This can lead to dental overgrowths. Teeth can also fracture or come out of alignment which can also lead to dental overgrowths.

Sharp enamel points occur normally within a horse's mouth. Most significantly, on the outside (buccal) edges of the upper arcade in the mouth and the inside (lingual) aspect of the lower arcades. This is because the horse maxilla (upper jaw) is wider than their mandible (lower jaw).

Horses naturally have a curve in their dental arcade which can prevent normal chewing. This can cause oral pain, dental issues, weight loss and other symptoms.

A horse's age can be estimated from the incisor (front teeth) once they are over 7 years old. The accuracy of ageing a horse as they get older becomes less accurate. Horses over 15 years old cannot be accurately aged.

Many different types of dental problems can occur within the mouth, some of these such as diastema (gaps between the teeth where food becomes trapped causing gum disease, recession, infection and decay can be very painful for the horse. Because horses are prey animals, they naturally hide symptoms of pain. Sometimes, it is only by examination of the mouth that we are able to identify these conditions and treat them appropriately.



### What to expect

Dental examinations should be performed with a dental speculum (a gag), a head torch and a mirror; other tools can be used to be able to see what is going on in the horse's mouth, such as an oroscope and x-ray. Some horses are very tolerant of dental treatment and investigation, other are not so accommodating and may need sedation. We will be able to help you decide whether your horse needs sedation or not.

Dental rasping can be performed with hand rasps or with electric rasps, both methods are suitable for dental treatment. However, more and more vets are now using electric dental equipment. We would always advise that you use a vet or qualified equine dental technician to perform your horse's dental work.

**If you are worried about your horse's teeth, or want to get started with regular dental exams, give us a call to make an appointment.**



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