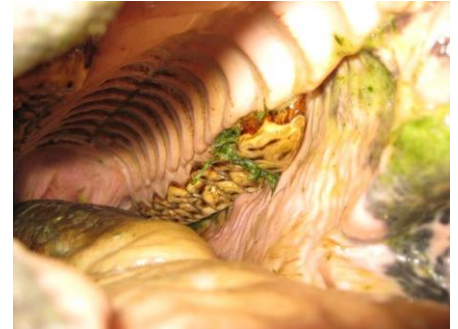


## Diastemas

Diastemas are gaps that can occur between horse's teeth. They can be caused by a number of factors, most commonly is old age. The diastema causes food to become trapped between the teeth causing decay, which can lead to infection. If left untreated, diastema in horses will lead to gingivitis and periodontal disease, this is an extremely painful condition which can stop your horse from eating altogether.



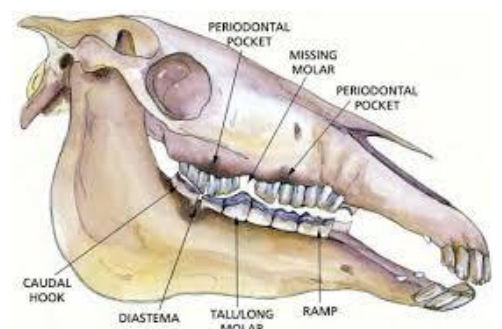
### Signs

Common signs that may indicate your horse has a diastema are:

- Difficulty chewing – taking longer when given long fibrous forage
- Quidding – chewing and spitting out small balls of forage
- Bad breath – food decaying between the teeth gives off a very horrible smell!
- Lack of appetite leading to weight loss

### Causes

1. Older horse – as horses age their teeth erupt and gaps may develop between the teeth over time. Food becomes stuck in the gaps and begins to ferment and causes gum irritation. If this isn't noticed (and removed/flushed) the gum recedes making the diastema larger and can make the tooth mobile.
2. Young horse – An uncommon condition in the younger horse, however, if the teeth do not erupt in the correct orientation they can develop diastemas.
3. Tooth removal – If your horse has had a tooth removed, the gap that it leaves behind can cause ongoing issues. As the remaining teeth have nothing in opposition, this can allow them to move slightly into the space, causing a diastema to form between other teeth.
4. Overgrown teeth
  - a. Back molar – Teeth that do not have regular dentistry can not only overgrow and become sharp, but can also grow in an upwards direction (exaggerated transverse ridge (ETR)) on their grinding surface. ETR's can grow upwards into the space between the teeth above pushing the teeth apart causing a diastema
  - b. 1<sup>st</sup> premolar – The first upper cheek tooth if left untreated can develop a hook. This hook, if long enough, can be forced forward by the lower teeth causing a diastema to form behind the tooth.



## Treatment

- Regular dentals to assess width/type diastema, which teeth they affect and if there is any evidence of periodontal disease – we would usually recommend a dental every 6 months as periodontal disease can develop.
- Flushing – if there is evidence of disease we may recommend flushing the diastemas with dilute hibitane when assessing every 6 months (sometimes we will recommend flushes every 3 months if the gaps are narrow and food is difficult to dislodge)
- Widening – If regular flushing is not enough we may recommend coming into clinic to widen the space. This involves taken a wedge from the front of one tooth and the back of another tooth to allow the food to move freely through the gap.
- Filling – if flushing and widening is not enough we would recommend cleaning the diastema thoroughly and putting in packing material to stop food collecting, and allowing diseased gums to heal. This process may need to be repeated as the filling may come loose if the teeth are slightly mobile.

