



Dental Care

Why is equine dental care important?

In the wild, a horse may graze for up to 18 hours a day. As herbivores they rely on the grinding mechanism of their teeth to break down their feed in order to obtain adequate nourishment. The amount of time spent chewing and the range of movement in the jaw is significantly greater when eating a coarse high fibre diet. The modern domesticated horse generally has access to more plentiful grazing and grass types which are softer, and easier to chew and digest. Unfortunately, this means there is more potential for the development of dental abnormalities over time. This is why regular examination and preventative treatment is essential in domestic horses.



Signs of dental disease

Clinical signs of dental disease are variable and there may be no outward signs at all. Some of the more obvious indicators include:

- Difficulty eating
- Quidding (dropping feed)
- Biting problems
- Weight loss
- One sided nasal discharge
- Ridden issues
- Halitosis (bad breath)
- Behavioural changes
- Facial swelling



Who should examine my horses' teeth?

Dentistry should only ever be carried out by a vet or a qualified Equine Dental Technician (EDT). The dental exam should not be simply thought of as a 'tooth rasp' - it is an examination first and foremost. Compare this with your own visits to the dentist. Veterinary surgeons will always thoroughly examine your horse's mouth. This will most commonly be done under sedation, meaning that subtle pathology will be identified at an early stage and appropriate treatment can then be given. Whom is permitted to carry out specific dental procedures is regulated by law. Veterinary surgeons are qualified to deal with the full range of problems which they may encounter within your horse's mouth. They are also able to take a holistic view of the patient and put any findings into context with the animal as a whole. Only veterinary surgeons can legally administer intravenous sedation.



Kings Bounty Equine Practice Client Fact Sheet

How often should my horse have a dental examination?

Your horse's teeth should be examined by your vet every 6-12 months unless advised otherwise. It's important to identify problems early. Prevention is always better than cure and as such owners are encouraged to have their horse's mouths examined on a regular basis.

Power instruments

In recent years the use of power instruments for equine dentistry has become commonplace. Power instruments allow the operator a greater degree of accuracy and the ability to deal with overgrowths much more effectively. These instruments do not replace the need for a high level of expertise and can cause harm in the wrong hands. Legally, they must only be used by suitably trained and qualified persons.



The oral examination

- A thorough dental examination begins with the taking of the horse's history and an evaluation of the horse as a whole
- Your vet will then examine the horse's head externally for any outward signs of dental disease such as swelling, enlarged lymph nodes or nasal discharge
- The lips and incisors (front teeth) will be examined also
- Your vet will place a gag in the horse's mouth which holds the jaws apart in order that a thorough examination may be carried out safely
- The oral cavity is flushed with clean water to remove food material
- A bright light source (usually a headtorch) and a mirror are required to examine all aspects of the mouth
- Once this has been done, findings can be recorded and any treatment carried out
- This almost invariably involves the removal of sharp enamel points using a motorised dental rasp