

EQUINE DENTAL SERVICE, INC.

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Equine Dental Hygiene

The teeth of horses are very different from those of humans. The major conceptual difference is that while the teeth of humans require little attention until something goes wrong with them, those of horses need regular intervention to be optimally suitable for what we require of the horse.

Sharp Points: due to normal wearing of the teeth, all horses not floated regularly have sharp points on tooth edges and open sores on cheeks and tongue. The pain this creates causes restricted mobility in the jaw and reduces feed efficiency and performance. Stiffness in the jaw leads to stiffness in the rest of the body and predisposes the horse to injury.

Wolf Teeth: vestigial first cheek teeth sitting where the bit should be, causing reduced performance.

Caps: failure to shed baby teeth in a timely manner causes pain, reduced performance and feed efficiency, and can lead to permanent malocclusions.

Malocclusion: mal- (bad) occlusion (meeting or coming together). About 20% of horses suffer malocclusions due to trauma, heredity, incorrect cap shedding or poor wear patterns. Most are partially or fully correctable in early but not later stages. Just like a misaligned vehicle, they always worsen if neglected. They may lead to pain, tooth loss, periodontal disease, colic, poor performance, and eventually may lead to the demise of the horse.

Incisors: irregularity or overgrowth may interfere with the horse's ability to chew with its cheek teeth. Horses often damage their incisors. The resulting abnormal wear can interfere with jaw movement and/or cause damage to TMJs. More than 50% of horses over 15 years old need removal of incisor overgrowth to restore greater chewing efficiency.

Bit Seats: modification of the first cheek teeth that improves performance in most bitted horses.

The following maintenance schedule is recommended for all horses:

Yearling: removal of wolf teeth and sharp points.

Two to Five Years: semi-annual exam to remove sharp points, maintain bit seats in bitted horses, and assure timely cap loss. Ideally, the horse's mouth should be made comfortable prior to the first biting.

Five Years & Up: annual exam to remove sharp points, maintain bit seats in bitted horses, and assure timely detection and correction of malocclusions. Horses with tooth loss, severe malocclusion or performing at high levels may need more frequent maintenance.

For more information: www.equine-dentistry.com

MYTHS AND LIES ABOUT HORSES' TEETH

Myth: only older horses need dental work

Truth: the younger the horse, the more its mouth hurts

Myth: my horse needs floating if he's having trouble eating

Truth: by the time symptoms of dental problems are obvious to the owner, it's often too late to fix the problem

Another truth: sharp teeth are often responsible for performance problems in horses who have no difficulty eating

Myth: female horses don't have wolf teeth

Truth: female horses get wolf teeth also; it's the canine teeth that many mares don't have

Myth: horses that live out on pasture don't get sharp points on their teeth

Truth: all horses have sharp points on their teeth if they are not floated regularly

Myth: sharp points form on horses' teeth because we feed them unnatural feeds

Truth: all horses have sharp points on their teeth if they are not floated regularly

Myth: sharp points form on horses' teeth because they are chewing abnormally

Truth: all horses have sharp points on their teeth if they are not floated regularly

Myth: if my horse isn't ridden with a bit, it doesn't need dental care

Truth: the headstall itself (even a halter) causes pain to the unfloatated horse; also one is missing the opportunity to detect early malocclusions in the stage where they can be corrected

Myth: wolf teeth fall out by themselves

Truth: this is quite rare and happens after most people are biting their horses; wolf teeth should be removed before the horse is bitten for the first time

POOR PERFORMANCE CHECKLIST

Poor trimming and/or shoeing

Poor tack fit or inappropriate tack

Soreness especially of the topline

Discomfort of the mouth

Poor, inadequate or inappropriate training

Poor, inadequate or inappropriate riding

Poor, inappropriate or inadequate feeding

Disease of the respiratory or cardiovascular system