

Equine Dentistry

The Horse's Mouth

- 2 rows of 6 incisors
 - used to shear off forage
- 2 pairs of canines (rare in mares)
- ± 1 pair of wolf teeth
- 2 rows of 6 cheek teeth on each side
 - used to grind food



Tooth Growth

- Like humans, horses have deciduous and permanent teeth
- A foal's first teeth erupt shortly before or after birth and are completely erupted by 8 months of age
- The first permanent teeth erupt at 2½ years and are complete by 5 years of age
- Teeth continue to grow throughout a horse's life

Domestication

- Horses are perfectly evolved for eating grass
- Most horses in NZ live mainly at pasture
- Domestication changes their environment, including their food.
- Predisposes to dental problems



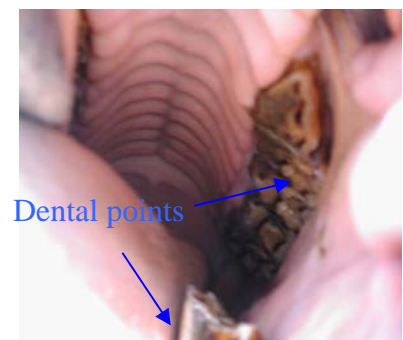
Clinical Signs of Dental Disease

- Quidding (dropping feed)
- Excess salivation
- Poor performance under bit
- Undigested feed in manure
- Weight loss
- Malodour/bad breath
- Nasal discharge
- Facial swelling



Common Dental Problems

- Sharp points on cheek teeth
- Retained deciduous teeth
- Wolf teeth pain from bit contact
- Hook formation
- Lost or broken teeth
- Abnormally long teeth
- Excessively worn teeth
- Tooth root abscess



Routine Dental Care

- Annual examination and rasping or floating of teeth by your vet is desirable
 - The upper jaw is wider than the lower jaw and the cheek teeth grinding surface is mildly angled
 - This mild angulation of the grinding surface plus the grinding action of the cheek teeth results in the development of sharp edges to the teeth.
 - Upper cheek teeth develop sharp edges on the cheek side, and lower cheek teeth develop sharp edges on the tongue side
 - Removal of these points is accomplished with dental files or “floats.”
 - Rasping or floating of the teeth should be performed on a routine basis approximately once or twice a year after the horse reaches 1 to 1.5 yrs of age, it may need to be more frequent in young or old horses
 - The type of diet will influence the degree of wear of the teeth, hard feed results in more rapid teeth wear
- Many minor problems such as sharp points, hooks and overgrowths are easily controlled with good preventative dental care



Tooth Root Abscesses

- Occurs following fracture of a tooth, gum disease or when gaps exist between teeth
- Bacteria penetrate the tooth pulp cavity and set up an abscess
- Signs include pain, nasal discharge, malodour/bad breath, facial swelling
- Diagnosis is by oral examination and head X-rays
- Removal of the tooth is necessary for treatment
- May be done standing, but surgical removal under general anaesthesia is often required

Conclusion

- Regular dental examinations are important for a horse's happiness and performance
- Many problems can be dealt with easily via routine veterinary care
- More serious problems may require referral for specialist treatment