

July 2020 Equine newsletter

Equine Dentistry

Why does it matter?

Horses like people can feel pain in their mouths but as prey animals don't always make it obvious. The only way of really evaluating a horse's teeth is generally to sedate them to put a gag on to open their mouth and properly examine it with a light and mirror to enable us to see everything.



What signs might a horse show if they have dental issues?

- Your horse might drop bits of food.
- Quidding (Balling food).
- Your horse might be losing weight.
- Your horse might be difficult to bend or resistant to the bit.
- Your horse may go off their hard food.
- There may be lumps on your horse's jaw.
- Your horse may not want to be tacked up.
- Your horse may have bad breath.
- They may be eating slowly.
- They may be packing food in their cheeks.
- They may have poorly digested food in their faeces.

Or they may not show any signs at all and may not alert you to their discomfort!



Contact us on 01297 304007

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How old does a horse need to be to have dental issues?

Horses of any age can have dental issues. It is worth starting regular dental checks from your horse's first year of life. Younger horses can have issues losing their caps so it is definitely worth getting them checked every 6 months. It is also often harder as an owner to spot dental issues in younger horses if they are not old enough to be in work as there will be less behavioral changes to look for.

How often should a horse have a dental?

We usually recommend your horse has a dental every 12 months however some may require 6 monthly checks or to be re-examined more frequently if there are any dental issues identified.

What is the difference between an equine dentist, an equine dental technician and an equine vet who does dentistry?

Anyone can refer to themselves as an equine dentist or equine dental technician (EDT) without any additional qualifications so it is important if using an equine dentist to check whether they are qualified or not. An easy way of checking is to look at the British Association of Equine Dental Technicians at www.baedt.com and at the World Wide Association of Equine Dentistry at wwaed.org.uk.

All equine vets can do dentistry and at Summerleaze we make sure all our vets are fully equipped and experienced to examine and treat dental conditions to a high standard dentistry. Stuart has additional qualifications in dentistry with him doing the BEVA/BVDA Equine Dental Technician examination in 2010. And in 2015 he was awarded the RCVS Certificate of Advanced Veterinary Practice in Equine Dentistry, becoming one of a very small number of RCVS Advanced Practitioners in Dentistry in the UK.

The main difference between using equine dentists/EDTs to using a vet is that there is a lot of restriction on what the dentists can do versus the vet. In order to sedate a horse a vet is required. The only things that dentists/EDTs who are not qualified can legally do is the manual removal of small dental overgrowths and sharp enamel points with hand instruments. Those that are qualified can legally do more however for large tooth extractions or similar procedures your horse will need to be referred to a vet.

Why do vets often want to sedate a horse for a dental?

In order to look at every surface of your horse's teeth a gag, a mirror and a light are needed as not all dental issues can be felt by hand. Potential problems that can cause issues and pain for your horse can be missed if the horse won't let us look at their mouth properly. Even for a simple dental rasp of sharp points where no other problems exist, we can do a far better job with an electric rasp rather than a hand rasp. Although some horses will allow us to use the electric rasp without sedating many will not and may prevent us from doing the best job we can if they aren't sedated. By sedating the horse we can also make the experience more pleasant for them, by reducing the stress of the situation for them.



What might a vet find during a routine dental?

Horses often develop sharp points on the edges of their teeth called Sharp Enamel Points which can rub against the side of their cheek and along their tongue. We can also find gaps between the teeth called diastemas, these can result in food material pocketing in between the teeth and gums. We may also find extra teeth, missing teeth, fractured or infected teeth that require removing. Horses can also develop infundibular caries- holes in the surface of the teeth. Some of these things may require further investigations such as radiographs.

If you have any concerns regarding horse's mouth please contact one of the team.

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