

EQUINE DENTAL CARE



Dental health and care are as important for horses as they are for humans. However, unlike human teeth, horses' teeth continue to grow, meaning that they require specialist care. While teeth are naturally ground down through eating and grazing, they often become uneven, causing issues that can become severe without proper care from an equine dentist.

Horses require "dental floating" on an annual basis. The term refers to the filing or rasping of a horse's teeth and comes from the instrument used, the "dental float".

For the safety of both the horse and the equine dentist, and for the comfort of the horse, sedation is often required for an effective dental exam. Before an exam begins, the mouth is flushed to remove food particles left from either grazing or eating.

Once the horse's mouth is clean, a speculum is put in place to hold the mouth open and a platform is placed under the chin so that the horse can rest its head.

The dentist then inspects the teeth while looking for sharp points and hooks, which can be smoothed down with the dental float thus improving the evenness of the bite. Abscesses or tooth decay can also be identified and treated.

If a particularly long hook is found, the dentist usually only floats a certain percentage of the tooth, returning for a follow-up visit in 3 or 6 months' time. Leaving the dental float on for too long, ie rasping too much of a hook away, will kill the tooth.



If a tooth is missing, the opposite tooth continues to grow into the vacant area, creating hooks. Removal of sharp points and hooks prevents cheek or tongue lacerations that can lead to ulcers.

The pain induced by an ulcer or laceration makes it difficult for a horse to eat, leading to feed being dropped and consequently body weight being lost. Tooth decay and abscesses can also lead to an inability to eat properly. Removing the affected tooth commonly solves these problems, and in some cases a root canal treatment is used on teeth with decay.

While the thought of the dental floating process may make you cringe, it is important to note the unique difference between the teeth of horses and humans. The root section of a horse's tooth, which where the nerve is located, is short and the crown is very long. There is no pain to the horse during floating as sharp points and hooks form at the top of the crown, far from the sensitive root.

Proper dental care from an equine dental professional is essential for all horses at every stage of their life and career. It translates into optimal comfort not only for feeding and grazing but also in terms of the bit placed in the horse's mouth.

