

Equine Dentistry Recommendations

Foals should be examined shortly after birth and periodically during the first year to diagnose and correct congenital dental abnormalities (existing from birth).

Yearlings have been found to have enamel points sharp enough to damage cheek and tongue tissue. Floating will make them more comfortable. This is also an optimal time to check for wolf teeth and remove them if needed. An exam near their first birthday is recommended.

Horses going into training for the first time, especially 2- and 3-year-olds, need a comprehensive dental check-up. Teeth should be floated to remove any sharp points and checked for retained caps. Caps should be removed if they have not been shed. This should be done before training begins to prevent training problems related to sharp teeth.

Horses aged 2 to 5 years may require more frequent dental exams than older horses. Deciduous teeth tend to be softer than permanent teeth and may develop sharp enamel points more quickly. Also, there is an extraordinary amount of dental maturation during this period. Twenty-four teeth will be shed and replaced by 36 to 40 adult teeth. To prevent maleruption problems, **twice-a-year examinations** are appropriate for young horses from 2 to 5 years of age.

Mature horses (6+ years of age) should get a thorough dental examination **at least annually** to maintain correct dental alignment and to diagnose dental problems as early as possible.

-Senior horses (17 years old or older) are at increased risk for developing periodontal disease. This painful disease must be diagnosed early for a successful treatment. Also, it is important to maintain a correct bite plane during a horse's teens in order to ensure a functional grinding surface beyond 20 years of age. Beyond the age of 20, the tooth surfaces may be worn excessively and/or unevenly, and dental alignment correction may be impossible.

-Horses over 20 years of age should receive a dental evaluation and nutritional counseling **at least annually** to maintain their conditioning and quality of life. With routine dental care, many horses will maintain a functional dentition into their third and fourth decades of life.

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RECOGNIZING DENTAL PROBLEMS

Horses with dental problems may show obvious signs, such as pain or irritation, or they may show no noticeable signs at all. That is due to the fact that some horses simply adapt to their discomfort. For this reason, periodic dental examinations are essential. Indicators of dental problems include:

- Loss of feed from mouth while eating, difficulty with chewing, or excessive salivation
- Loss of body condition
- Large or undigested feed particles (long stems or whole grain) in manure
- Head tilting or tossing, bit chewing, tongue lolling, fighting the bit, or resisting bridling
- Poor performance, such as lugging on the bridle, failing to turn or stop, even bucking
- Foul odor from mouth or nostrils, or traces of blood from the mouth
- Nasal discharge or swelling of the face, jaw, or mouth tissues
- Choking or difficulty swallowing food
- Discomfort lowering head to graze

Oral exams should be an essential part of an annual physical examination by a veterinarian. Depending on your horse, the exam may include sedation you're your horse needs a dental float it will be sedated. Every dental exam provides the opportunity to perform routine preventative dental maintenance. **If you notice any of the above signs of a dental problem, even if it is not quite time for your horse's annual exam, call your veterinarian and schedule an appointment.**

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The following chart shows the approximate ages at which different teeth erupt. By referring to it, you may detect potential abnormalities of your own horse associated with teething.

Deciduous (Baby Teeth)

1st incisors (centrals)	Birth or 1st week
2nd incisors (intermediates)	4-6 weeks

Permanent (Adult Teeth)

1st incisors (centrals)	2 1/2 years
2nd incisors (intermediates)	3 1/2 years
3rd incisors (corners)	4 1/2 years
Canines (bridle)	4-5 years
Wolf teeth (1st premolars)	5-6 months
2nd premolars (1st cheek teeth)	2 1/2 years
3rd premolars (2nd cheek teeth)	3 years
4th premolars (3rd cheek teeth)	4 years
1st molars (4th cheek teeth)	9-12 months
2nd molars (5th cheek teeth)	2 years
3rd molars (6th cheek teeth)	
3rd incisors (corners)	6-9 months
1st, 2nd, & 3rd premolars (cheek teeth)	Birth or first 2 weeks for all premolar