

How to avoid horse teeth problems

Why does my horse need attention to his teeth?

Horses' teeth are constantly erupting and, left alone, many would eventually develop dental disease.

What is "rasping"?

Due to the teeth constantly erupting, sharp enamel points can form on the edges of the large cheek teeth at the back of the horse's mouth. These sharp points can form anywhere, but they are particularly found on the outside (nearest the cheeks) of the upper teeth and the inside (nearest the tongue) of the lower teeth.

These edges are removed using a tooth file, called a rasp. The rasp may be manual or electric.

How often should my horse's teeth be rasped?

Depending on the age and presence of disease, most horses will

EQUINE VET

Colin Mitchell of Scott Mitchell Associates, Hexham, on looking after your horse's teeth



need to be examined annually.

Who should I ask to examine/rasp my horse's teeth?

A vet can perform dental examinations on a horse. Vets have the benefit of being able to use sedation, nerve blocks, antibiotics and pain-killing drugs to ensure the procedures are not painful to your horse and any disease can be adequately treated. Vets are generally quite flexible as to when they visit and will come to a yard to see one horse

If you choose to use an "equine dentist", it is best to choose one who is a member of the British

Association of Equine Dental Technicians (BAEDT).

What is involved in a dental examination?

Your vet may suggest giving your horse a small dose of a sedative. This will relax your horse and reduce anxiety allowing the placement of a mouth gag. This is a hinge-like instrument which can be placed between the horse's front teeth and opened up to maintain an open mouth. The mouth will then be rinsed out with clean water to remove saliva and food material. The head may be placed on a stand

to rest at a comfortable height.

The vet will use a torch to illuminate the mouth then examine the teeth and soft tissues (cheeks, tongue, gums, hard and soft palates).

A mirror will often be used to allow inspection of areas in the mouth that are more difficult to see.

What problems might the examination show?

A dental examination will commonly show sharp enamel points



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which need removing/reducing using a rasp. Other problems that may be noted include: spaces between teeth (diastema), missing/fractured teeth, abnormal patterns of wear, soft tissue injuries/abnormalities, gum disease/infections.

If my horse has teeth problems, what signs might I see?

The signs of dental disease can be mild and vague, such as: recurrent back pain, difficulty with head carriage/dressage moves/biting.

There may be signs which relate to oral problems, such as: difficulty/slow chewing certain feedstuffs or an unpleasant smell from the mouth/saliva

In severe cases of dental disease, there may be weight loss and food may be seen to drop from the mouth when eating (this is called quidding).