

Dentistry



PENNY BROWNING'S

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Swap sugar-filled treats for humble root veg like swedes, carrots and parsnips

Cut out sweet treats for better teeth

Q I've heard stable and field licks can be bad for my horse's teeth, is this true?

Louise Barbour, Essex

A Yes this is absolutely true. The licks you give your horse for treats are predominantly bound with sugar and sugar

syrup. We're seeing an increased number of horses with tooth decay, due to the fact they're being fed more sugary treats and are spending less time grazing as they would do naturally. This unnatural dietary change causes an imbalance in the pH of your horse's teeth, which can cause dental caries (tooth decay). Studies are currently being carried out at Edinburgh University on the effects of pH components fed to your horse, with sugar being one of the main influencers. I would never recommend feeding treats

of any kind to your horse, they don't need them. If you want to give him something to keep him entertained use one of the following instead:

- Himalayan salt lick on a string
- Vegetables, such as parsnips and swedes
- Carrots hidden in hay in a double-netted haynet, so he has to search to find them
- Split hay into two haynets, hanging one so it swings, and one in its usual place

These are much healthier alternatives and will help prevent tooth decay in your horse.

PHOTO: PREITH LEIGHTON/ALAMY

Daily check-ups

Q My horse is 25 years old and has some gaps between her teeth. Grass gets stuck in them - I try to get it out with a toothbrush but she doesn't like it. What can I do?

Rachel Barton, Gloucestershire

A Any grass stuck between your horse's teeth will be causing inflammation of her gum line. I'd recommend you use a soft, child's toothbrush to remove the grass yourself, but if your horse won't let you do this, try using your fingers instead. Gently massage the grass stuck between the teeth to loosen it (ideally wearing a rubber glove). Gentle daily removal needs to be done to prevent a big build up and further problems from occurring. You don't need a dental technician to remove the trapped grass if you keep on top of it, however if the area looks darkened and inflamed, call out your vet or a qualified technician to take a closer look at your horse's front teeth.

Sometimes something simple such as grazing on a haynet can help to loosen the grass, so it's worth trying this out. To get a good look at your horse's front teeth, tease her with a carrot at head height and look at them while she's lifting her lips.



You can try to remove debris from between your horse's teeth using your finger

Take a look beneath the surface

Q My horse has started snatching the bit and tossing her head when ridden - could this be related to her teeth?

Joanne Sharpe, Cheshire

A Yes very possibly and this is a very common problem. When a horse's teeth are sharp, they'll start to cut into their cheek and cause them pain. They'll let you know if this happens and, in the case of your mare, she's doing this by snatching the bit and tossing her head. I'd recommend you have her mouth checked by your vet or a qualified

equine dental technician to remove any sharp edges. Some riders will change their horse's bit as they think this is the problem, but the best thing to do is get your horse checked over for any dental issues. Once you've made sure her teeth are completely comfortable, you can then move onto checking whether you're using the most suitable tack.



Regular check-ups by a qualified equine dental technician will help prevent dental problems