

What is proper dental care for my horse?

One of the most basic medical services that we humans rely on is routine dental care. While our horses don't need to go to the equine dentist for a "cleaning" every six months, it turns out that they can benefit from routine dental services as well.

One common misconception is that young horses do not need any dental care; however, this is one of the most important times to have their teeth checked. Pulling a horse's wolf teeth, or first premolars, is a great place to start. These teeth are very small and have no role in the grinding or mastication of food. Many horse trainers will have them removed prior to training because they cause discomfort when placing the bit in the horse's mouth.

In addition to wolf teeth, the deciduous, or "baby," premolars and molars can cause young horses problems. These teeth are very soft and when the upper and lower arcades grind against each other they will form very sharp points that can cause ulcers on their cheeks and tongue. Removing these points not only makes it more comfortable for them to eat, but also helps to prevent problems associated with fighting the bit. Horses that are in training to compete at young ages will greatly benefit from having their teeth floated immediately before they start training and several months prior to their competition.

After a horse has turned 5 years old and has a "full mouth" (meaning all their deciduous teeth have been replaced by permanent teeth), they should have a routine dental exam and float every 12-18 months. These annual exams can help prevent the formation of severe dental problems that take years off of their life and can be expensive to correct.

In the geriatric horses, regular dental care can literally be the difference in life and death for that animal. As a horse ages, their body less effectively utilizes the energy they consume and as a result must eat more than in previous years. Many older, thin horses are simply unable to grind their food properly as a result of a severe dental abnormality, thus making it impossible for their body to ever consume enough calories to meet its needs.

In summary, regular dental check-ups can make a difference in the short term and long term performance of your horse. No matter if you are asking your horse to carry you in a race, in the show ring or in the pasture, they need to be able make the most out of their feed to give you what you need. If you have any questions about your horse's teeth, please do not hesitate to call or stop by.