

# SOUTH EAST COUNTRY VETS

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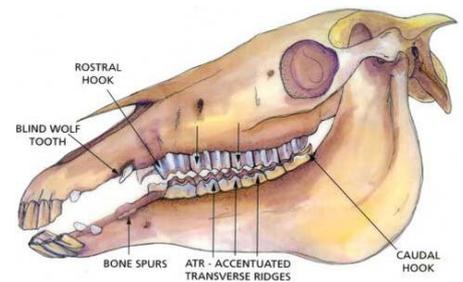


## VETERINARY DENTAL CARE – HORSES NEED DENTISTS TOO!

Interestingly, many of the dental diseases seen in humans are also diagnosed and treated in the horse! For this reason, most responsible horse owners understand the importance of regular dental care for their animals. Performance, comfort and wellbeing are all dependent upon a properly functioning and comfortable set of teeth. Regular and prophylactic dental care will guarantee your horses teeth are maintained in proper order and contribute to long lasting good health.

### A LITTLE ABOUT HORSE'S TEETH....

Horse's teeth are unusual in that they continue to grow during most of an animal's life. The upper teeth are wider than the lower teeth to allow grinding of their food and domesticated horse's teeth wear differently to those in the wild. Due to altered methods of feeding and feed products, domesticated horses chew differently resulting in the outside edges of the upper teeth and inside edges of the lower teeth becoming very sharp. Other problems that can arise include caudal and rostral hooks developing, loose teeth, infected teeth and retained baby and wolf teeth amongst others.



### SIGNS THAT YOUR HORSE NEEDS A DENTAL

Ideally, all horses should receive regular dental attention from a certified veterinary practitioner from the age of 6 months. This will ensure your horse has a comfortable mouth when being ridden or trained and that any problems that may arise can be attended to early. Signs that your horse may have dental discomfort are listed below.

- Behavioural problems: head tossing, rearing, pulling hard, tongue over bit, head tilting, rearing
- Mouth problems: spilling feed, packing feed in the cheeks, bad breath, slow eating, drooling when eating swelling of the face or jaw and reluctance to drink cold water
- General health problems: losing weight, recurrent colic, dull coat

### DENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Young Horses

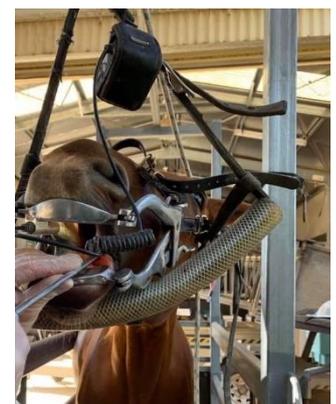
Dentistry can make the biggest difference in young horses by setting the horse up with good teeth for life. A horse is learning at this young age and pain can lead to resistance in training due to issues such as sharp points, wolf teeth and loose baby caps. Between the ages of 2.5-4.5 years of age, a horse will shed 24 baby teeth that are then replaced with adult teeth - this leaves plenty of room for things to go wrong! Regular dentals every six-twelve months and early wolf teeth removal are essential for horses younger than 5 years of age.

#### Middle Aged Horses

It is important to continue the upkeep of your horse's teeth as they age. During this time, we are often training or working horses and asking the most of them so a painful mouth can make progress slow in the competition arena.

#### Old Horses

Old horses have older teeth and therefore need more regular dental check-ups. Gum disease is common in older horses and needs to be detected and treated early. Gum disease is very painful and can lead to premature loss of teeth as well as other health problems. As their teeth grow out and are lost, there is a higher risk of them developing waves or sharp points that stop them from being able to chew properly which is a disaster in an old horse.



## **BENEFITS OF A DENTAL**

### **Assess the mouth**

Assessing the mouth as a whole is the most important part of an equine dental. Checking for normal conformation, abnormal dental structure, ulcerations, impacted food, infections and more is the main stay of good veterinary equine dentistry.

### **Removing sharp points**

With an altered wear pattern in the teeth of domesticated horses, it is important to remove any sharp points that have developed within the mouth that may be causing painful ulcerations.

### **Wolf Teeth**

Wolf teeth are the first premolar teeth in horses and are not used for chewing. Because they have no useful function, they are best removed in horses that are ridden. Removal is always done with local anaesthetic to prevent pain and using the appropriate tools to ensure no root is left behind. By removing them, we create good access so that a bit seat can be done.

### **Riding Comfort**

Performance horses cannot concentrate on their work and what you are asking them to do if their mouth is reacting with the bit or gear. Sharp teeth can cause a lot of pain and the horse will quickly tell you this.

### **Bit Seat**

A bit seat involves contouring of the upper and lower cheek teeth where the bit sits. This maximises comfort and improved performance in most horses.

### **Feeding Economy**

No horse can properly digest and utilise its feed if its mouth hurts to chew. Feeding horses can be very expensive whether it be for supplementing or when travelling and competing. If you take good care of your horse's teeth, they will be able to chew and digest the food better and take full advantage of the nutrients available which can save a large amount of money in feed.

### **Avoiding Impaction Colic**

When a horse cannot bite or chew properly, the grass it eats is not broken down to an appropriate size for digestion. This can be quite obvious when there are stems more than 1.5cm long in their faeces. High fibre diets or hays can increase the potential for the food to impact in the intestinal tract. This can be magnified again if the weather is cold, the horse is drinking less water and if they have a sore mouth. Impaction colic can be fatal so prevention is key.

## **WHY SHOULD I GET MY VET TO DO THE DENTAL?**

Equine dental care is so much more than just simply floating your horse's teeth. A full veterinary dental involves a complete dental and oral evaluation as well as appropriate treatment and ongoing preventative care undertaken by a trained professional. With your horse safely restrained in an appropriate set of stocks, all teeth are manually and visually examined, gum health is assessed and the mouth is checked for the presence of periodontal disease and decay problems.

We have all the necessary equipment, including a powerfloat, and most importantly are able to use sedation and analgesia whenever necessary to ensure your horse experiences comfortable and pain-free treatment. When required, further investigation can be carried out with a dental mirror, x-rays of teeth with suspect fractures or an abscess and biopsies of suspicious tissues. We have portable and permanent stock across our clinics so we can come to you or you can come to us.

## **WHAT ELSE CAN BE DONE AT THE SAME TIME?**

A general health check will be given to all horses that receive a dental and this is a great time for you to ask your vet any questions about your horses' wellbeing that you may have. A faecal egg count to check on how well your worming regime is working can be done at the time of a dental and any vaccinations that are due such as tetanus, strangles or Hendra. All horses receiving a dental should be up to date with their tetanus vaccinations or receive a vaccination at the time of the procedure. Any open wound, such as those caused by mouth ulcers, leaves a horse prone to picking up the tetanus bacteria so this is vital to ensure your horses' health and safety.

## EQUINE WELLNESS PACKAGES

Have you heard about our Equine Wellness Packages? Across all of our clinics we offer a comprehensive package that takes care of all of your horses annual needs in a single visit. The programs are tailored to suit you and your horses needs dependant on their age or working schedule. The packages are excellent value and offer HUGE savings on all of your annual equine preventative health needs.

### **Annual Equine Wellness Packages Include:**

- Full physical examination of your horse
- Dental (performance float and bit seat)
- Full years' supply of wormers plus a faecal egg count
- Full years' worth of Tetanus vaccinations
- Blood test to assess the health of internal organs in older horses
- Discounted Hendra vaccinations at \$88 for a whole year



Call us today and we can work out what package is most suitable for your needs and get your horse up to date with all of their preventative health requirements.

*This information sheet is not intended as a substitute for a veterinary consultation.*

*It is recommended that a consultation be arranged with a veterinary practitioner if you have any concerns with your horse's health.*