

Dentistry

Here at Abbey Equine Clinic, we believe that every horse should receive regular, high quality dentistry as part of their routine health care.

The horse's mouth is a vital point of communication between horse and rider that is often overlooked, a large percentage of horses live with oral pain without showing outward signs. This is because they are excellent at not showing any signs of dental disease until it become very advanced, and often by this point irreversible. Every horse should therefore have a routine dental examination every 6 – 12 months, in order to identify and treat abnormalities at an early stage.

The advantages of this level of preventive dental care include:

- Improving the horse's welfare by alleviating oral soft tissue and/or dental pain.
- Improving feeding efficiency by optimising chewing function.
- Prevention of severe dental disease later in life by regular floating and balancing of the teeth and earlier identification of problems.
- Improving the horse's acceptance of the bridle and making him more even in the contact by alleviating oral pain.

The last point in particular is very important as often signs of oral pain while ridden will be mistaken for a behavioural or training issue. For example, many riders consider it normal for their horse to be one-sided or unsteady in the contact, when in fact there may be mouth ulceration from the teeth that is causing this behaviour.

Horses' teeth differ from ours, in that they erupt, and are worn down, continuously through their lives. Therefore, small abnormalities in the way the teeth erupt or wear down can become magnified overtime, by altering the chewing pattern, causing a vicious cycle of abnormal tooth wear and dental overgrowths, which can develop relatively quickly, this is why an examination should be performed every 6--12 months.

Equine dentistry has developed greatly in the last ten years. Modern equine dentistry has a huge impact preventing dental disease, not just treating it. It focuses on a thorough clinical examination of the teeth and oral cavity, in order to identify small abnormalities of the teeth and soft tissues at an earlier stage.



The mouth is then carefully balanced by precisely reducing small dental overgrowths in order to re-establish the ideal relationship between the teeth and chewing function. Most horses which receive this level of proactive dental care will reach old age with excellent teeth, avoiding common, preventable problems such as wave mouth, painful gum disease and the need for extractions.

We recommend dental examinations and treatments are carried out under standing sedation in order to allow full visualisation of the mouth and effective, accurate rasping without causing pain or distress to our patient. Sedation allows relaxation of the strong jaw muscles, reducing post procedural discomfort, and allowing complete inspection of the back teeth. Many of the dental instruments are hard and sharp so sedation reduces the risk of injury to both the horse and the veterinary surgeon.

