

BENEFITS OF EQUINE DENTISTRY

Equine Dentistry has re-evolved to become a significant part of many equine practices. In the early 1900's through World War II, most veterinarians routinely performed dental procedures for their clients. The subsequent decrease in the use of horses resulted in less teaching of equine medicine and surgery, and equine dentistry took a backseat in the curriculum of veterinary medicine.

During the 1970's and 1980's, an increasing number of veterinarians expanded their interest in equine dentistry. Horse owners and trainers realized that properly performed equine dentistry had a beneficial effect on performance as well as feeding efficiency. Proper teeth care can increase feed utilization, maximize horse comfort, and improve the overall health and performance of your horse.

The mouth continues to change throughout the life of the horse but no changes are as great as between the ages of 2-5. Horses in the 2-5 year old range often require frequent dental care. During this time a large number of adult teeth are erupting and deciduous (baby) teeth are shedding. Also, deciduous teeth are softer and tend to develop points faster than adult teeth. Mature horses (5 years and older) require a thorough oral exam at least once yearly, even if signs of dental disease are not apparent.

Teeth erupt at the same rate they wear down and the upper cheek teeth are 30% wider than the lower cheek. This situation causes sharp edges or points to form on the cheek side of the upper teeth and the tongue side of the lower teeth. Pressure from halters, bits, and hackamore's on these points can cause pain and reduce performance. Bits that pinch tissue against sharp edges of the teeth also cause pain, which leads to head tossing and excessive "mouthing" of the bit. With regular dental care you can smooth out the sharp points and create a bit-seat or ramp to alleviate bit pain.

COMMON SIGNS THAT YOUR HORSE NEEDS DENTAL CARE:

- **Weight Loss**
- **Dropping Feed**
- **Abnormal Chewing**
- **Head Tossing**
- **Resisting the Bit**
- **Droling**
- **Chronic colic**
- **Rearing**
- **Nasal Discharge**
- **Foul Breath**
- **Head Tilting**
- **Poor Hair Coat**

BENEFITS OF PROPER DENTAL CARE:

- ***Better health for the horse*** - A horse that cannot masticate (grind) its food properly will not be able to get proper nutrition from its feed. This will lead to poor health, weight loss, vitamin, mineral and nutritional deficiencies, poor hair coat, poor hooves, overfeeding to maintain weight, among other health problems.
- ***Better performance and response to training*** - Horses suffering from pain and abnormal pressure in the mouth due to dental abnormalities will not be focused on its job or training. It will be more focused on getting away from the pain instead of responding to particular performance cues or training methods.
- ***Lower risk of colic and chokes*** - A horse that is not able to masticate (grind) its food properly and completely will swallow it partially masticated. Partially masticated food that is swallowed can lead to choke because the food bolus is too large and cannot pass through the esophagus. Partially masticated food that does pass through the esophagus and into the stomach is not able to be digested properly. Therefore, large particles of undigested feed can get trapped in the intestinal region causing a colic.
- ***Better longevity of the horse*** - Proper dental care and the ability for a horse to masticate its food for maximum nutritional, vitamin and mineral intake, will have better health and be able to perform and live longer.
- ***Lower cost of feeding*** - With proper dental care, along with the ability for a horse to properly masticate its feed for maximum nutritional intake, allows a horse to stay fuller longer. This is a tremendous benefit for horse owners because they are able to maintain improved feed efficiency, reducing feed costs.

Proper dental care is essential to your horse's health, performance and comfort. Consult with your veterinarian concerning the specific dental needs of your horse and make an oral exam a part of your horse's preventative health maintenance.