

# DENTAL CARE FOR YOUR HORSE



*This brochure is presented by*

## Equine Veterinarians Australia

*EVA is committed to the highest standards  
of veterinary care for horses*

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EVA IS A SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP OF THE  
AUSTRALIAN VETERINARY ASSOCIATION  
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Your veterinarian is dedicated to improving the health and welfare of your horse. Equine Veterinarians Australia helps its members stay current on the latest trends and treatments to ensure that your veterinarian is qualified to address the specific dental requirements of your horse.

EVA members are known for their excellent reputation and training on dental care and are well placed to provide your horse with the best dental treatment. EVA has produced this brochure to assist horse owners learn more about good equine health and dental practices. With accurate knowledge about dental care and its importance for the overall health of the horse, horse owners can work in conjunction with their equine veterinarian to ensure their horse receives the very best dental treatment to remain in optimum health.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE MY HORSE'S TEETH CHECKED BY A VETERINARIAN?

To function at its very best, horses must have a properly functioning and comfortable set of teeth. The performance, health and comfort of a horse are all dependent on this. A veterinarian is the best person to check your horse's teeth. As with any veterinary or medical practice, dentistry requires a sound scientific background in equine anatomy, physiology, medicine and diseases. A veterinarian is qualified to address all health issues involving dentistry. In addition, many EVA member veterinarians have completed post graduate training in equine dentistry giving them specialist skills to deal with dental problems. If your horse requires sedation for dental treatment, then this medication may only be legally prescribed and dispensed by a veterinarian. Sedation is a useful tool to allow detailed oral examination and treatment of your horse with minimal stress and discomfort.



## HOW DO I KNOW IF MY HORSE NEEDS A DENTAL CHECK UP?

Horses may display certain symptoms if their teeth are causing them problems. These include dropping food, eating slowly, weight loss, fighting the bit, head-shaking and the impaction of food in their cheeks. Any of these symptoms will affect your horse's health, performance and longevity.

## WHAT IS INVOLVED IN A DENTAL CHECK-UP?

Regular dental maintenance by your veterinarian involves performing a thorough examination and checking for abnormalities such as sharp enamel points on the cheek teeth, removing retained caps and extracting wolf teeth. Treatment of hooks, waves, ramps and tall teeth and other abnormalities that may cause discomfort to your horse, will be attended to. A proper assessment and treatment of the incisors (the front teeth) is important.

## HOW OFTEN SHOULD MY HORSE HAVE A DENTAL CHECK-UP?

Proper dental care and regular checkups should be a routine part of caring for your horse. It is recommended that horses be examined every 6 to 12 months, but this very much depends on the age of the horse and the work performed. It is best to see your veterinarian and obtain his or her assessment of the timing between examinations.

## DENTAL CARE FOR THE YOUNGER HORSE

At or soon after birth, foals will have a total of 16 teeth present - four incisors or front teeth and 12 premolars or back teeth. Dental problems can be congenital, that is present at birth. Examples include parrot mouth (overbite) or sow mouth (underbite). These conditions can be treated, but to do so they must be diagnosed very early on. For this reason foals should be examined soon after birth. Twelve months is an ideal time to begin routine dental examinations and treatment as the first of the permanent cheek teeth erupts so it is a good time to check this is occurring normally and to identify any problems. Dental abnormalities can reduce weight gain by 30% which can have long lasting effects on a horse during this critical development period.

From one year to six years of age, horses will shed their 24 deciduous first set of teeth and up to 44 permanent teeth will erupt through the gums. Common problems in this period are sharp points and deciduous or baby teeth that fail to shed. Horses that receive regular check ups are ensured the best outcome for any dental abnormalities through early detection, and will have a much better mouth to carry them through adulthood. It is also important to ensure all horses have any source of oral pain properly diagnosed and treated before beginning their education. Failure to do so can lead to the development of behavioural changes associated with pain and the negative experiences can have lifelong consequences for both horse and handler.

### DENTAL CARE IS IMPORTANT FOR ALL AGES

**F**rom seven years of age all adult teeth should now be present. The rate of wear begins to slow slightly as the teeth harden and most horses in light work on a mostly pasture based diet should be examined every 12 months. Horses that are fed concentrates should be examined more regularly as this particular diet changes the way a horse chews and thus affects the way the teeth wear. Again, early detection of problems in all age groups is very important. As horses get older, common dental conditions account for about 30 percent of the decrease in weight, and proper dental care is vital to ensure these horses maintain adequate body condition.

### SPECIAL NEEDS OF OLDER HORSES

**R**egular examinations are particularly important for the older horse. Dental problems can increase as the horse ages and it is good practice to have your aged horse's teeth assessed at regular intervals to ensure he maintains his condition and general health.

### PROVIDING THE VERY BEST CARE

**D**ental problems can be very common at all stages of a horse's life. Regular complete clinical and dental examinations are essential for early detection and correction of dental problems. If not diagnosed and treated early, dental abnormalities can have long term negative consequences for the horse. This can lead to various medical problems in addition to potentially increasing behavioural problems. Maintaining regular dental check ups for your horse with your trained veterinarian will ensure that your horse retains optimum health.