

## COULD IT BE HIS TEETH?

Today, it's possible to take care of every need that your horse may have. We've veterinarians to look after their general well-being and farriers to look after their feet. For specific muscular, carriage or performance problems, we can call osteopaths, physiotherapists and even holistic healers. However, one area of the horse that can impact on so many others is the horse's mouth; cue the dentist.

Dental problems can surface in many ways. Your horse may start to act differently, perhaps becoming irritable or bad tempered because of the pain. They may try to avoid the painful area and give the indication of a back or leg problem when moving. Remember that when we place any tack on a horse, even a head collar, we could be placing pressure on a sensitive area, making it even more difficult for the horse to avoid pain.

Many problems eventually become attributed to the horse's teeth. However, it is not always easy to pinpoint a dental problem. We know that dental problems can be serious and the equine dentist can do much to resolve the underlying cause, alleviate the pain and therefore symptoms.



### **Eating action**

When horses eat, they nip the grass or pull hay from nets with their incisors. During chewing, food is rolled and moved backwards along the molar arcade. If the horse's mouth is balanced and working correctly then the food particles should end up at around 3mm in length and the horse will gain optimum benefit from its food.

Generally, the incisors do not usually need attention. Problems are more common with the molars which may not wear evenly. You may notice your horse spilling food when eating, headshaking, avoiding contact with the bit or other tack, possibly even avoiding pressure with the head collar. They may carry themselves differently to avoid the painful contact and this could be mistaken for a back problem or lameness.

Another tooth that can cause problems is the Wolf Tooth which, although it had a role in the horse thousands of years ago, is surplus to requirements today. The location of these teeth – in the bar of the mouth – is what actually causes the problem. When they come into contact with the bit, they can actually become quite sore. You may notice the horse trying to avoid contact with the bit or possibly just moving or holding its head in an abnormal manner.

Although some horses perform well without their wolf teeth being removed, they are in the minority. It is a very quick procedure – and non traumatic to the horse – to remove them as standard during a visit from the dentist.

### **Choosing a dentist**

This can be a minefield as anyone can buy a rasp and a bucket and begin to practise. Here at Flawborough, we work with dentists who are members of the Worldwide Association of Equine Dentistry (WWAED) and are trained to the standard recognised by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and the Department of Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

This standard is referred to as level 2 and a dentist with this level of qualification is deemed to be exempt from the vet act which would normally cover these treatments. Level 1 is defined as being basic diagnosis and rasping and - although your horse will more than likely only need this – there is no recognised examination for this level.

It is important for your horse's well-being as well as your enjoyment as a rider that your horse gets a regular visit – approximately every 6 months - from the dentist. This will ensure a less stressful time for the horse at each visit and regular inspections will make sure that major problems do not occur. By choosing a properly qualified dentist, you will be helping to raise the standards for equine care.