

## **Learn to Recognize your Horse's Dental Problems**

Horses with dental problems may show obvious signs indicative of oral pain or irritation, or they may show no noticeable signs at all. This is because many horses simply adapt to their discomfort, resulting in “silent” progression of dental disease. For this reason, periodic oral and dental examinations are essential to your horse's health and should be performed as part of the annual physical examination by your veterinarian. Routine dental maintenance such as floating (rasping) to remove sharp enamel points or hooks is easily performed at this time, thus helping prevent the development of more serious dental disease. Unique problems arise as the permanent teeth erupt; therefore dental exams should be performed twice yearly on horses aged between 2 and 5 years.

It is important to recognize dental problems early because as problems become more advanced and severe, they cause the horse more discomfort and become more difficult and expensive to treat. The American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) has prepared the following list of indicators of dental or oral cavity disease that signal the need to seek veterinary attention for your horse:

1. Loss of feed from mouth while eating, difficulty with chewing, or excessive salivation.
2. Loss of body condition.
3. Large or undigested feed particles (long stems or whole grain) in manure.
4. Head tilting or tossing, bit chewing, tongue lolling, fighting the bit, or resisting bridling.
5. Poor performance, such as lugging on the bridle, failing to turn or stop, even bucking.
6. Foul odor from the mouth or nostrils, or traces of blood from the mouth.
7. Nasal discharge, especially if it is from only one nostril
8. Packing of feed in the cheeks or swelling of the face, jaw or mouth tissues.

For more information about proper dental care, ask your equine veterinarian for “Dental Care: The Importance of Maintaining the Health of Your Horse's Mouth,” a brochure provided by the AAEP in conjunction with Educational Partner Bayer Animal Health. Additional information is available on the AAEP's horse health Web site, [www.myHorseMatters.com](http://www.myHorseMatters.com).

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