

Considerations for an effective teeth floating program

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Imagine sharp points on your teeth that rub your mouth or cheeks while you chew your meals. Considering that horses' teeth continue to grow as he ages, this is an expected occurrence when attempting to eat grain or simply graze in the pasture. Adding to an already tremendous dilemma, a horse will chew in an unnatural form and consequently cause damage to other teeth and parts of the mouth while attempting to subdue some of the pain.



Twice each year, your horse should be having a dental examination to determine if he or she needs their teeth floated. Horses that are under 10 years old should get two examinations per year. These examinations should begin as early as possible for foals. Floating a horse's teeth is defined as - using a rasp (both by hand and power tools) is used to file down these rough edges on a horse's tooth. The filing doesn't hurt (no nerves there) and make chewing much easier and comfortable.



Many horses can go a few years in between each floating, but there are also many that require floating once or twice a year. It is a good rule of thumb to get teeth checked while conducting early spring vaccinations; and again in the fall when preparing for fall care of your horse. Please see photos for an example of teeth going too long without a floating.

A thorough dental plan can extend the life of your horse greatly and allow their behavior to be much more pleasant and predictable.

Some symptoms of a horse that may need his or her teeth floated:

- Difficulty chewing (accompanied by ears pinning and tail swishing)
- Reluctance to drink cold water
- Quidding (dropping food while eating)
- Excessive unchewed grain in manure
- Constipation colics
- Weight loss
- Swelling or tenderness in jaw area
- Reluctance to accept a bit (raises head high while bridling)
- Throwing head while riding
- Throwing head while stopping
- Reluctance to turn a certain direction while riding
- Excessive slobbering
- Turning their heads to the side when they chew
- Snotty nose from only one nostril
- Foul odor from mouth or nostrils

Sources: Dr. Rick Parker, Oklahoma State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital

University of Arkansas, United States Department of Agriculture and County Governments Cooperating.

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