

## ROUTINE EQUINE DENTAL CARE

Routine dental care is now accepted as an important part of good horse management but the reasons for this are not widely understood.

Horses are unusual in possessing teeth that are continuously growing to replace surface tooth material that is worn away during normal chewing. Abrasive silicates (sand like materials) which are very common in plant are responsible for this tooth wear during chewing.

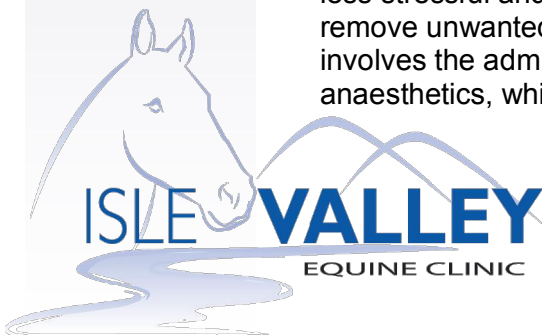
The positioning of horses' teeth is also unusual in having the two rows (arcades) of upper teeth placed wider apart than the two rows of bottom teeth. This means that the outer edge of the upper teeth and the inner edge of the lower teeth are not worn down during chewing. This results in rows of enamel points being left behind when the adjacent areas of tooth are worn away. The rate at which these points develop is largely determined by the abrasiveness of the diet, but spikes of 2 – 3 mm will normally develop within a year.

Misalignment of the teeth from back to front, in parrot mouthed horses, for example, will also result in other areas of over growth at each end of the upper and lower arcades.

These points and areas of overgrowth impair the normal chewing motion because they restrict the sideways sliding action of the jaws during eating. Areas of overgrowth are very sharp, causing scratches and cuts to the cheeks and tongue resulting in pain and discomfort. One of the earliest signs of dental problems is a reluctance to accept the bit. In more severe cases horses will spill food from the mouth (quidding) whilst eating.

An annual dental examination is recommended and involves a thorough inspection of the mouth and removal of by rasping of any points and areas of discomfort. This can easily be combined with the yearly booster vaccination. Occasionally some competition horses will benefit from twice yearly examination. It is also recommended that horses over 20 years of age are examined on a twice yearly basis as their teeth are shorter and softer therefore more susceptible to problems.

Horses, being herbivores, do not need to open their mouths wide during eating, so care must be taken when practising dentistry not to force the mouth open to wide or for too long. Unlike the dental technicians, veterinary surgeons are able to use sedation which makes any treatment less stressful and much easier for your horse. We are also permitted to remove unwanted wolf teeth and any area of broken teeth. This usually involves the administration of drugs such as sedatives and local anaesthetics, which are only available legally to veterinary surgeons.



# ISLE VALLEY EQUINE CLINIC

We are equipped with the latest portable motorised equipment necessary to treat the more complex dental problems and are fortunate at having several members who are highly qualified in equine dentistry and who travel widely to treat difficult cases. More complex cases that require radiography and possible dental extractions can of course be treated at the clinic.

We offer the routine dental work as part of our Free Visit days. One day a week one of our vets is in your area undertaking routine work such as vaccinations and dental work so there is no visit or call out charge. For further details, please telephone or visit our website.

Isle Valley Equine Clinic, Eleighwater, Chard, Somerset, TA20 3AF  
Tel: 01460 66099 Fax: 01460 68052 [www.islevalleyvets.co.uk](http://www.islevalleyvets.co.uk)

