



## **Maui Equine Veterinary Services**

### **Equine Dental Care**

#### INTRODUCTION

The conditions horses live in today are very different from those found in the wild; because of this it is important that dental care is part of your horse's routine health maintenance.

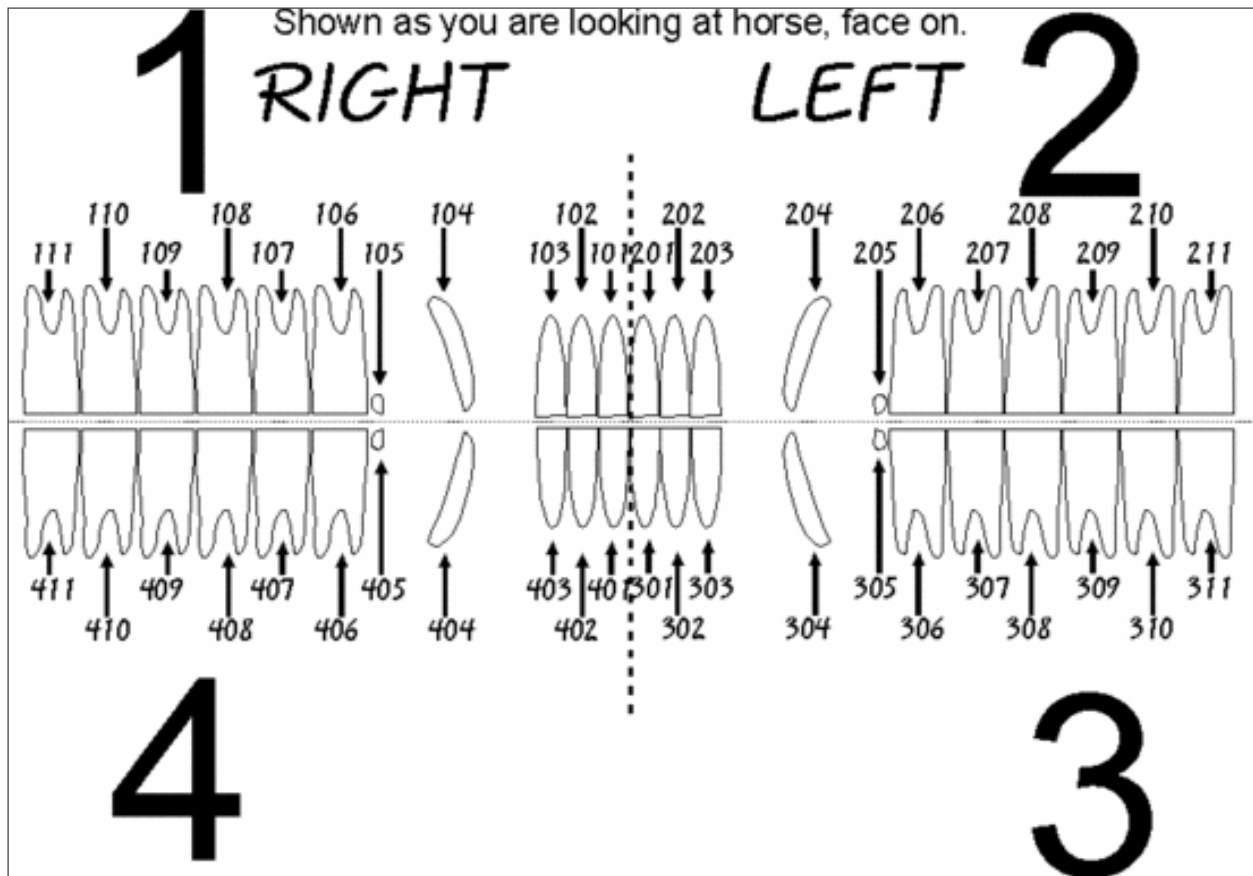
#### **The Horse's Mouth**

Horses in the wild were meant to graze on rough forage nearly continuously using their front teeth (incisors) to cut forage and the cheek teeth (premolars and molars) to grind and mash. Their teeth grew continuously and were designed to wear against the opposing tooth, either above or below, to prevent excess growth or abnormal wear patterns. In modern days horses are fed much softer feed and graze less than their ancestors. This can create abnormal wear patterns and sharp points.

The horse's lower jaw is narrower than it's upper jaw and the horse grinds it's feed in a sideways motion, because of this, sharp points tend to form along the edges of the cheek side of the upper teeth and the tongue side of the lower teeth. When cheek teeth are out of alignment hooks can form. Horses also are expected to live much longer, often to 30 or more years. With this increased age comes more time to develop dental problems.

Horses get two sets of teeth in their lifetime, the deciduous teeth (baby) and permanent teeth. The number of permanent teeth varies from horse to horse and sex also plays a role. Most mares have 36 while males can have up to 44 (males sometimes have canine teeth)

The teeth erupt in this order and a numerical system is used when identifying the teeth of a horse.



### Preventative Maintenance

Floating the teeth removes the sharp enamel points and can help create a more even bite plane. This will allow your horse to chew properly and comfortably, utilize feed better, and live longer. Wolf teeth, are routinely extracted to prevent interference with the bit. In some cases extractions are necessary to remove a loose or infected tooth. Sedatives, local anesthetics, and analgesics may be administered by your veterinarian to help your horse relax and be more comfortable throughout dental procedures. We at Maui Equine prefer to use a power float on your horse. This allows us to do a precise, more thorough job than a hand float in less time. This decreases the horses time in a speculum and allows us to address all the teeth, especially those in the back of the mouth without causing trauma to the mandible like hand floating can. Because floating teeth can cause micro tears in the mucosa of the horses mouth it is important that a Tetanus vaccination has been given within the past 30 days otherwise a booster should be given.

When horses begin training (2-3 years of age) they should have a comprehensive dental check-up. Teeth should be floated to remove sharp points and checked for retained caps. Horses in the 2-5 year age range require more frequent (twice yearly) dental exams than older horses because deciduous teeth tend to be softer than permanent teeth and may develop enamel points more quickly. By performing frequent dental examinations at this age more severe dental problems later in life can be avoided.

Adult horses (5-15 years of age) should be examined at least once a year whether or not there are obvious signs of dental problems. It is important to maintain an even bite plane during a horses adult years to ensure a level grinding surface into it's 20's.

Because horses live much longer today than their ancestors, dental maintenance must continue into their aged years. Dental extractions become more common in this age group as does

Bit Seats are sometimes used as a form of preventative maintenance to improve comfort and performance in riding horses. A bit seat is filed in the first cheek tooth by rounding the surface. This

alleviates discomfort caused when the bit is pulled across the cheek tissue into the sharp edge of the tooth. Extreme bit seats can be harmful, thus it is best to discuss your horse's dental needs with your veterinarian.

## **Common Dental Problems**

Just like humans, horses can develop a variety of dental problems, some becoming so severe they require surgery to correct. Having your veterinarian check your horse's teeth regularly will allow you to head off potential issues and or correct existing conditions. The most common dental problems include:

- Sharp enamel points**
- Retained caps**
- Discomfort caused by wolf teeth**
- Hooks**
- Long and or sharp canine teeth**
- Lost or broken teeth**
- Abnormal or uneven bite planes**
- Excessively worn teeth**
- Infected teeth and or gums**
- Misaligned/poor apposition**
- Gum disease**

Some horses may show obvious signs of dental discomfort, while others may show no noticeable signs at all. So although your horse may show no noticeable signs of dental problems it is still important to have your veterinarian check the teeth regularly.

Here are some signs of dental problems:

- Dropping of feed from mouth**
- Difficulty chewing**
- Excessive salivation**
- Loss of body condition**
- Large or undigested feed in manure**
- Tossing or tilting head**
- Bit chewing**
- Fighting bit or bridle**
- Poor performance**
- Foul odor or blood from mouth or nostrils**
- Nasal discharge**
- Swelling of the face, jaw, or mouth**

## **Dental Terms**

**Cups**-Hollow, rectangular or oval shaped, marks on the tables of the permanent incisors. The cups are generally worn away completely by age 11.

**Hook/Notch**-A hook appears on the upper corner incisor around age 7 disappears by 8, reappears around 13 and again disappears 1 year later.

**Galvayne's Groove**- The Galvayne's groove appears on the upper corner incisor and produces a vertical line. The line generally appears at age 10, reaches halfway down the tooth by age 15, is completely down the tooth at age 20 and then begins to disappear, usually gone by 30.

**Hooks**-Sharp points on a tooth.

**Step mouth**-This occurs when one cheek tooth has grown longer than the others in that jaw.

**Wave mouth**-A wave mouth occurs when at least two of the cheek teeth are higher than the others, so that when viewed from the side the grinding surfaces produce a wave like pattern.

### Tooth Growth Chart

Deciduous Teeth (baby teeth)	
1st Incisors (centrals)	Birth to first week
2nd Incisors (intermediates)	4-6 weeks
3rd Incisors (corners)	6-9 months
1st, 2nd, & 3rd premolars	Birth or first 2 weeks

Permanent Teeth (Adult Teeth)	
1st Incisors (centrals)	2 years
2nd incisors (intermediates)	3 years
3rd Incisors (corners)	4 years
Canines (bride)	4-5 years
Wolf Teeth (1st premolars)	5-6 months
2nd premolars (1st cheek teeth)	2 years
3rd Premolars (2nd cheek teeth)	3 years
4th Premolars (3rd cheek teeth)	4 years
1st Molars (4th cheek teeth)	9-12 Months
2nd Molars (5th cheek teeth)	2 years
3rd Molars	3-4 Years