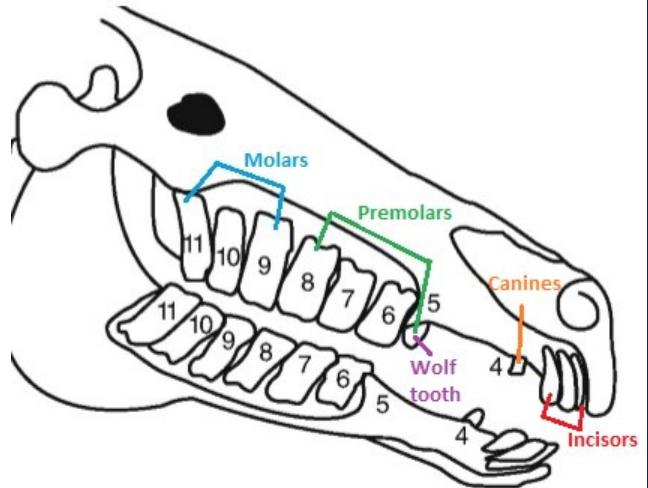




# Routine Dental Care

Horses (just like most mammals) have four types of teeth - incisors, canines, premolars and molars. Unlike humans, who have brachydont (permanent) teeth, horses have hypodont teeth - meaning they have long roots and their teeth continually erupt throughout their lives at a rate of 2-3mm per year. This continuous eruption is necessary to contend with the rate of wear on the chewing (occlusal) surface of the tooth caused by the natural fibrous diet of the horse.



However, in modern times, many horses have a mixed diet or a diet that does not contain the level of dietary fibre necessary to cause natural wear to the teeth. These horses are prone to develop sharp edges to their teeth, which can cause trauma to the overlying soft tissues such as the cheeks and tongue (Image 1). Routine dental examinations and rasping of teeth will allow such problems to be identified and corrected in order to prevent further discomfort or pain to the horse.



*Image 1 - Sharp prominences on these teeth have led to ulceration of the cheek tissue adjacent to the tooth.*

Undiagnosed dental disease is a major issue in the UK and routine dental examinations are recommended in order to assess the dental health of each individual horse as well as to address any abnormalities discovered. Routine examinations may be performed at varying frequencies (depending on individual patient factors) though are usually recommended a minimum of once per year.



Certain horses, such as older horses, may require more frequent examinations as the prevalence of dental disease amongst older horses is much higher than in young horses. A 2012 study by one of our practice vets (Jo Ireland) identified dental disease in over 95% of the geriatric horses included in the study. Common issues include diastemata (pictured above), caries and fractures.

*Continued Over....*

## Dental Examination

The dental examination usually involves collection of a clinical history & palpation of the face and jaw, followed by placement of an open mouth speculum ("gag") in the horse's mouth and digital and visual examination of the teeth. A full dental examination is better performed under standing sedation as this allows a more thorough and precise examination of the mouth, and is safer for both the horse and the vet in attendance.

The use of a dental mirror and dental picks, for example, can be very difficult in an unsedated horse as they often try and remove the instruments with their powerful tongue!

All of our vets are qualified to perform dentistry. We have both hand rasps and wireless motorised equipment and can visit your horse on your yard or you can bring your horse into the hospital for the procedure. Our routine dental examination charge includes sedation.

There are also a number of Equine Dental Technicians (EDTs) in the local area. If you choose to enlist the services of an EDT rather than your vet, we strongly advise that you choose a fully qualified EDT who is registered with the British Association of Equine Dental Technicians (BAEDT) or category 2 members of the Worldwide Association of Equine Dentists (WWAED) as these EDTs have undergone training and passed an examination approved by DEFRA. It should be noted that certain procedures, however, can only be performed by veterinary surgeons, such removal of incisors, cheek teeth or unerupted wolf teeth, diastema widening, oral surgery and provision of prescription-only medications (such as sedation or bute). Removal of erupted wolf teeth can be performed by EDTs under direct, continuous veterinary supervision.

If you would like any more information or advice on dentistry, please give us a call.



Image credits:  
Collins, N. M., & Dixon, P. M. (2005). Diagnosis and management of equine diastemata. *Clinical Techniques in Equine Practice*, 4(2), 148-154.  
Tremaine, H., & Pearce, C. (2012). A modern approach to equine dentistry 4. Routine treatments. *In Practice*, 34(6), 330-347.  
Tremaine, H., & Casey, M. (2012). A modern approach to equine dentistry

**Please contact us if you would like more information.**