



Horse Care Info Sheet

Dental Dilemmas

Don't let out of sight be out of mind!

As discussed in Equine Guelph's [dentistry fact sheet](#), there are some common signs of dental issues:

- decreased appetite
- becoming head shy
- undigested feed in the feces
- foul breath
- reddened or inflamed gums
- reacting negatively to a bit



If you suspect your horse is having a problem, contact your veterinarian for help. Many horses suffer from undiagnosed, painful dental disorders. A thorough clinical examination using a full mouth speculum is a pre-requisite to performing any equine dental procedure.¹

Lameness – when a horse goes lame, owners and trainers tend to look at legs first. Pain in the mouth does not always make the check list of possible causes for gait abnormalities.

Head tossing during riding– not so fast going for that martingale. Consider the issue may be discomfort in the mouth or the back first. A horse that suddenly does not want to accept the bridle is another big tip off that something may be going amiss in the mouth. Painful, dental-related lesions may also cause bit (bitting) problems, including abnormal head carriage, resistance to the bit and headshaking during work ([Scrutchfield, 1999a](#)).² Your vet will check for sharp points, wolf teeth and other potential problems.

Rearing – a dangerous behaviour indeed. Is the horse unhappy with the contact or is there an abscess forming in the mouth or some other cause of pain? Don't wait until a rider is ditched to explore all the possible physical ailments including teeth. At the first sign of any bad behaviour, a complete physical exam is warranted.

Losing weight – Your horse may have 24/7 access to forage but if they can't chew properly, they may not be consuming enough nutrients. Weight loss can occur in very serious cases of dental disorders.

Tilting – a horse that tilts its head while eating or while being ridden may be trying to take pressure off one side of their mouth.

Digestive Emergency – horses that are having difficulty grinding up their food are at risk of feed becoming lodged in the esophagus (choke) or even impaction colic. Another reason to have your veterinarian perform regular dental work and oral exams.

Sources:

1. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1090023304000796?via%3Dihub>
2. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1090023304000796?via%3Dihub>

Resources and References:

<https://thehorse.com/151055/10-equine-dentistry-resources-on-thehorse-com/>

https://www.equineguelph.ca/pdf/infosheets/Dentistry_Infosheet_final_2013.pdf

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