



Q&A FROM A HORSE DENTIST

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The Low Cost of Dentistry

Many times I am asked about the monetary benefits of doing regular dentistry. Ongoing research is a big part of our horse dentistry business and being married to a marketing graduate provides MacKinnon Equine Services the benefits of regular updated research findings. One of the most recent comprehensive projects being conducted is finding a number of dentistry related benefits that directly impacts cost. Let me share some of the findings with you.

Horses, with their teeth annually balanced correctly is the focus of the research (five years of age and under balanced semi-annual).

FEED SAVINGS AND BETTER HEALTH. Dentistry significantly reduced the amount of food required for proper growth and maintaining good health. (Regular dentistry ensures that the teeth are properly grinding all of the feed we provide our horses therefore allows the feed to properly process and pass evenly through their system. Some clients have reported a 50% savings in feed quantity while maintaining or improving condition on free choice hay.) When horse's teeth work together to grind their food correctly, good nutrition is a result. Good nutrition therefore provides for better health. Healthy horses in turn have stronger hooves, a better coat and a stronger resistance to illnesses. When the teeth have been "balanced" in broodmares and stallions, breeding programs become more consistent showing higher conception rates and fewer losses (breeding results taken from an independent study).

TRAINING SAVINGS. Horses with their teeth routinely and correctly balanced perform better; when they are able to freely move their jaw, the horse begins to listen to the rider and not the pain in their mouth. An increased number of professional trainers found great success when they had their horse's teeth balanced prior to introducing equipment or getting on their back for the first time. The number of horses returning to the trainer dropped significantly. While most trainers are strong proponents of dentistry. A lot of performance horses are sent back to the trainer for "touch-ups" when the horse's teeth have grown out, problems are often absolved by regular "proper" dentistry. Although, trainers with an understanding of the dental benefits are addressing the horse's teeth problems long before they start work. Good trainers are booked months in advance and time is a precious commodity.

REFLOAT SAVINGS. I certainly intend to make no generalizations for the equine dental industry, however in my own practice, refloats are cheaper. Horses routinely and correctly balanced don't suffer from sever hooks, ramps or protuberant teeth. Table angles and bit seats are maintained in good shape and not left to over grow.

In two separate research projects, initial findings look to have positive effects and benefits to young, developing horses as well as older horses from regular dental care. Findings are preliminary and it is too early to confidently attribute 100% of the beneficial differences to dentistry. Although the differences are notable enough to mention

when discussing documental dental findings.

LONGEVITY, our horses today are living and used longer as a direct result of proper (balanced) dentistry. Most of my clients either have or have used an old "Steady Eddie" for an inexperienced rider. The longer we can keep all the grinders in "Old Eddie" working as a unit, the longer "Eddie" will be around. Horses can do very well in to their late twenties and early thirties providing they have received regular and proper dental maintenance. Studying the effects dentistry has on a horse's longevity was stimulated by fragmented data from the last 75 years of horse dentistry in the United States.

GOOD START. A group of weenlings and yearlings received a dental check up finding the beginning stages of hooks, ramps and protuberant teeth. They were floated, balanced and provided with free choice hay, oats and daily exercise. The growth rate, overall health and condition shows a marked difference from the weenlings and yearlings that did not receive a dental check up and equilibration. The stimulus for studying the effects dentistry has on young horses and the direct impact it has on their health, potential and longevity came through personal curiosity. My wife and I, have been involved with raising and training horses since we've been married. Being a horse dentist, my curiosity urges regular dental checks on every horse we own, including the weenlings and yearlings. After a few years of finding dental irregularities with most of the young horses we foaled or purchased, my wife was encouraged to develop a comparative study. A point to caution: it is imperative that only a certified horse dentist work on a young horse. Their bones are soft, teeth look different and inexperience or lack of knowledge can compromise a horse for life.

Horses left untouched or merely floated were the comparative study group.

FEED CONSUMPTION HIGH. Horses left untouched or merely floated eat aggressively; bolting their oats, rushing through their oats, or pushing all other horses away. It was noted that horses with teeth that cause them pain, push others away from the feed until they have had time to eat since it takes them longer to chew their food. Other horses eat constantly. Horses that are unable to chew their food up completely before they swallow have voids in their system caused by large particles of unchewed food. The voids in their system cause the horse to feel hungry all of the time, therefore needing to eat constantly, never feeling satisfied.

TRAINING EXTENDED. Horses suffering from sever hooks, ramps, wedges, loose or protuberant teeth offer trainers a whole host of training puzzles and surprises. The mere makeup of a horse causes training problems when their teeth are left untouched. Realizing that a horse can gap his mouth at a walk or trot to avoid pain caused by misaligned teeth. However, he must then clamp his jaw together when he negotiates a turn or picks up speed. Very seldom is a horse unwilling – if it is his teeth, he is unable. If a trainer can't get a horse to perform a given task, they will generally stay at the trainer's until they do. Hooks, ramps and protuberant teeth lock a horses head into one head set, therefore asking a horse to collect comfortably is difficult. Wedges, make it more difficult to flex or turn on one side or the other. Loose baby teeth cause pain when their jaw clamps together by picking up speed.

FLOAT CHARGES HIGHER. Generally speaking, the first time around cost more. Since I charge for what I do, (instead of charging a higher flat rate for everyone) horses suffering from sever hooks, ramps, wedges, smiles, broken, loose or protuberant teeth, incorrect table angles – does add up. Horses teeth grow out at an 1/8" a year – top & bottom, that's a 1/4" of growth annually; if left to over grow, two years or more later, I start over again.

MacKinnon Equine Services is committed to ongoing market research, in an effort to provide the best in dental care with an emphasis on improving good health and performance benefits. If you would be interested in being part of a horse dentistry research project you can contact Tamara at MacKinnon Equine Services, Ltd. (306) 266-2060 or (403) 936-5394. Ensuring the health of your horse's teeth rank right up there with good nutrition and regular hoof care. Preventative maintenance by a competent certified horse dentist is the key to a horses good health, performance and longevity, however success depends on an annual maintenance commitment. Have a certified equine dentist take a look and get the answers '*straight from your horse's mouth*'.

Study group: 100 horses between the age of weenlings - 5 yrs old; 100 horses between the age of 6 - 10 yrs old; 100 horses between the age of 11 - 15 yrs old; 100 horses between the age of 16 and older. Five years of study.

If you have a question about your horse's teeth and how they might relate to his health or performance call (306) 266-2060, (403) 936-5394 or e-mail your question to mackequine@sasktel.net.