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Why Does My Horse Turn Better One Way than the Other?

There has been at least one horse at almost every barn I've been called to, that turned better one way than the other. Many horse owners are surprised when I ask them, "does he turn better to his right?" when I am still conducting the pre-dental exam without ever seeing him ridden.

To the horse, if turning one way hurts less than turning the other, he will prefer to turn the way that does not hurt. But, what would cause a horse discomfort or pain in his mouth? To answer this question, one must realize that a horse's jaw moves forward and to the side he is being asked to turn. If any tooth was protuberant, his jaw would be prevented from moving forward, making it difficult to freely move without pain. Hooks, ramps and protuberant teeth, sheered molar tables and wedged incisors are all causes of pain in a horse's mouth when he attempts to turn, therefore would be the reason he turns one way better than the other.

Let me clarify one thing before I continue. In order for a horse to turn 'correctly'; his head should be wither height, forehead perpendicular to the ground as his hind end tucks underneath him so his front legs can effectively cross over while pivoting on his hind end. And as indicated above, there are several points inside the horse's mouth that influence his ability to turn 'correctly' and comfortably.

A horse lets us know when his mouth is uncomfortable by forcing his head up, stiffening his neck, tipping his nose, rooting-out on the reins, or moving heavy on his front end. If a horse does not 'have-balance' in his mouth he can not 'get-balance' in his feet. All of his actions become compensatory to the point of pain. Therefore, if you are experiencing any of these undesirable behaviors while riding your horse, have a certified equine dentist take a look and get the answer '*straight from your horse's mouth*'.

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