



Q&A FROM A HORSE DENTIST

Grant D. MacKinnon C.Eq.D.

Certified graduate of the Academy of Equine Dentistry &
proud member of the Association of Equine Dental Equilibration

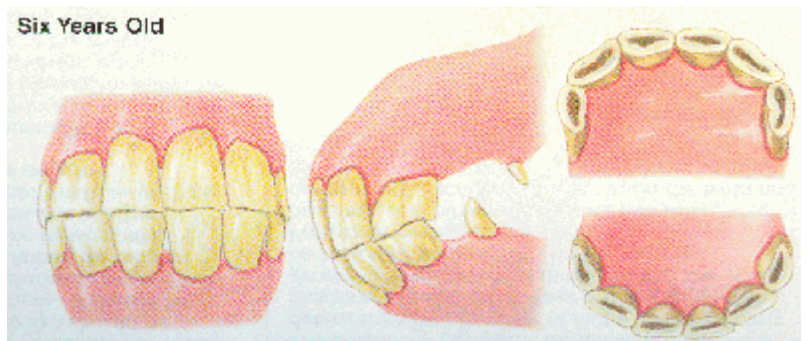
Foal Dental Care

Question: I am looking at a 6month old colt in the USA - vet just did a pre-purchase examination and says that he has a slight over bite (just under a ¼ inch) - what is your take on this - should I be concerned enough not to purchase him?

Answer: A ¼ inch over bite for me, is not significant enough to decide against purchasing a 6 month old foal if he meets all the other conformation requirements whereas a foal has the next 5 years to develop permanent dentition. Proper maintenance and intervention can positively influence development. Over bites or parrot mouths are rare as a general rule however, checking dentition in his early years can prevent some riding and behavior issues as he grows and matures.

Generally speaking, there are two main reasons, problems are found with a foal's dentition.

- (1) Trauma induced: since horses use their nose to explore the world around them, oral injuries are common and baby teeth are easily displaced or severely damaged. Permanent damage to the root of the adult tooth is common, stunting the tooth's growth or displacement may be the result.
- (2) Genetics: parents play a large roll in the development of a good set of teeth. Throughout my practice, I repeatedly find mares and stallions with dental problems that pass their problem on to their offspring. Especially stallions.



An extreme example, one of my current clients stood an exceptionally talented ranch horse at stud for a number of years. His oral cavity was too small for the size of teeth nature provided, putting him into the "high maintenance" dental care category. If his owners became slack with his dental schedule, a mere month behind in their regular dental care would effect his disposition and performance suffered dramatically. Over

the years, I've tracked a number of young horses across the three prairie provinces with the same small oral cavity relative to the tooth size, back to this particular stud.

Dental Facts:

Foals are born with 12 molars; the first three, back teeth. Equine incisor (front teeth) irruption schedule: the central incisors erupt (come in) between 6-8 days, middle four incisors come in between 6-8 weeks and the corner incisors come in between 6-8 months. Similar to human babies, their head is not large enough to facilitate the number of teeth needed to process adult nutritional requirements at birth, therefore is why dentition develops proportionate to age and skeletal structure.

Equine are erupting baby teeth / losing baby teeth / replaced with erupting adult teeth / erupting permanent molars – 36 teeth between 6 days to five years old. Since horse's teeth grind away small partials of tooth with every bite of food they chew, it is especially important that the upper and lower teeth erupt, fall out and replaced with an adult tooth at the same time so that



Illustration 3

the upper and lower teeth meet in the middle at the same time. If one tooth fell out and got a head start of the opposing tooth, they will meet in a place other than the middle which will cause your horse any number of problems throughout his life. Teeth that don't erupt in unison similar to illustration #3, prevent lateral excursion (side to side chewing is compromised, proper collection is difficult without pain and leads to turning with a stiff neck). It is very important to make sure young horses teeth are maturing at the proper stages and the reasons why horses under the age of six years old should have a certified equine dentist check their teeth every six months.

Remember, all undesirable actions are compensatory to any point of pain and attributes to a horse's balance and ability to perform. If you are experiencing 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 1-306-763-0386, 1-403-936-5394, 1-208-420-2701 or e-mail mackequine@sasktel.net.

