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What & Where Are Wolf Teeth? Does My Horse Have Them?

Wolf teeth are common in horses today and are generally known to be a shallow rooted tooth. Officially, they are located in the diastema which is the interdental space between the incisors and the molars (bars); generally, on the top (maxilla) just in front of the first molar. To the equine dentist they sit just in front of #6th tooth. To the rider, the wolf tooth is just behind and above where the bit sits in their horse's mouth and the reason for some riding problems. Because of the tooth's location can easily break off or fracture by using excessive pressure on the bit. Seventy-five percent of all horses, male and female alike, have at least one wolf tooth and are often times confused with canine teeth. *[Note: canine teeth are well rooted, located just behind the incisors and grow in length to be used by stallions during the breeding season. Canines are also known to be fighting teeth, bridle teeth or breeding teeth. There are a small percentage of mares known to have canines. Canines are not removed but ground down in order to make biting easier.]*

Most bits are designed to work off the horse's cheek, tongue and bars providing opportunity for bits and wolf teeth to regularly collide. There are three common scenarios associated with wolf teeth and riding problems. First, a fractured wolf tooth remains in place and can cause extreme pain to the horse when bumped; second, remaining fragments of a broken wolf tooth can act as a sliver just under the skin; and third, sometimes a wolf tooth stops growing, sits just under the skin and also acting like a sliver. Each scenario, causes pain to the horse every time the bit is pulled into the tooth. Therefore, when the rider puts pressure on his horse to perform and a wolf tooth is bumped, he can expect a variety of undesirable reactions. Some are as mild as head tossing or mouthing the bit; other reactions come as aggressive resistance to turn one way or the other. Uncommon wolf teeth (located on the bottom) can also cause discomfort by simply putting a bit in a horse's mouth.

Let me close by clearing up a few myths associated with wolf teeth. Wolf teeth do not fall out on their own because they do have a nerve, blood supply and feeling. Wolf teeth can cause life long riding problems if not properly removed. Wolf teeth removed with a hammer and screw driver is not the cowboy's way.

Proper removal of wolf teeth during your routine dental maintenance and prior to extensive training can make the training process go much better. Remember, all undesirable actions are compensatory to any point of pain and attributes to a horse's balance. 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.