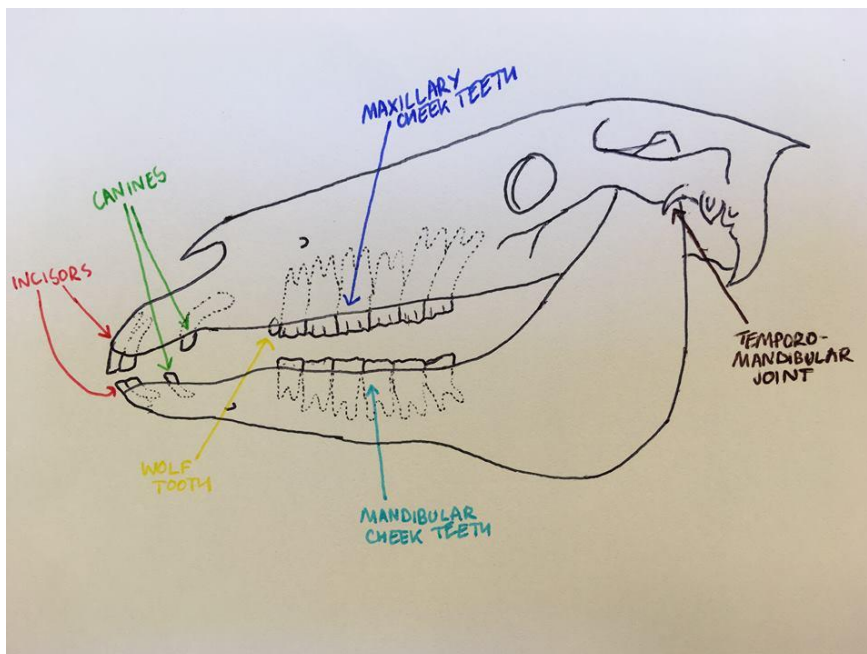




Dentistry

Dental Anatomy

- A normal adult horse may have between 36-44 teeth
 - 12 incisors (front teeth)
 - 24 premolars/molars (cheek teeth)
 - Up to 4 canine teeth
 - Up to 4 wolf teeth
- Horses may not have any canines or wolf teeth!
- Younger horses will have 'deciduous' teeth – also known as 'caps' which are the equine equivalent of milk teeth. As the horse ages these will be lost.
- Horses are 'hypsodonts' – they have very long tooth roots when young which erupt into the mouth at a gradual rate as the crown is worn away.
- Their teeth have sensitive pulp cavities – just like ours!

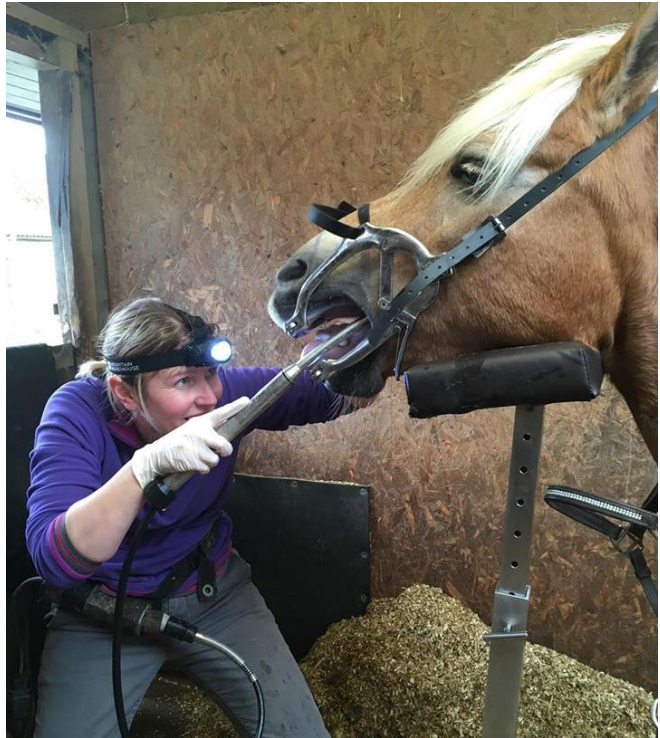


Bexfields Farm
Galleywood road
Chelmsford
Essex
CM2 8BY
01245 346904

admin@claredonequine.co.uk

Routine Dental Care

Did you know that up to 90% of horses have an undiagnosed dental pathology? Horses and ponies are very good at hiding dental problems – often things may be noted on a dental exam without the horse showing any outwards signs of a problem. Therefore we recommend **annual dental checks** as a minimum for all horses, and if there are problems the horse may benefit from more regular checks.



For well behaved horses it is possible to do a very basic dental check without sedation, but for horses that are nervous, do not tolerate the dental gag, or if we have a suspicion of dental pain or problems then a mild sedation can be given to facilitate a thorough exam of all teeth. Often if the horse is throwing themselves around this is impossible – as well as not as safe for you, the handler, ourselves or the horse.

What might indicate my horse has a dental problem?

- Ridden problems, e.g. throwing the head around, difficult in the contact, strong on one rein etc.
- Dropping food when eating – also known as ‘quidding’
- Weight loss
- Swelling of the face – this can be due to things like a displaced tooth, a tooth root abscess, or food being packed over a painful tooth – so the swelling may not be there all of the time
- Nasal discharge – especially if just from one nostril
- Smelly breath
- You may see a broken tooth – for example an incisor

Bexfields Farm
Galleywood road
Chelmsford
Essex
CM2 8BY
01245 346904

admin@claredonequine.co.uk

What can my dentist do, and what can my vet do?

All vets are insured and qualified to do teeth, and our vets at Clarendon have undertaken further equine dentistry training as part of their continuing professional development. We can perform the following:

- Routine dental checks and rasping, using hand or motorised rasps
- Extractions of wolf teeth – both ‘normal’ and blind/unerupted wolf teeth
- Evaluation of diseased teeth
- Extraction of teeth if required, using sedation and local anaesthesia
- X-rays to check for problems at the roots of the teeth
- Referral to a dental specialist vet if required for more complex extractions, endodontics/restorative work, or advanced imaging such as CT scanning.

Many owners choose to use an ‘equine dentist’ to check their horse’s teeth. We would strongly recommend that if you are going to do this, you only use dentists that are registered with the ‘British Association of Equine Dental Technicians’ (BAEDT) as these will be trained in equine dentistry, have passed all of their examinations, and be insured and regulated. If you use a dentist that is not off this list then there is no guarantee they have any training – you wouldn’t let just anyone loose on your own teeth, so why on your horse? The BAEDT membership list can be found online.

BAEDT members are allowed to perform routine rasps using hand rasps or motorised equipment, and remove extremely loose teeth (i.e. those that are falling out by hand). They are also allowed to remove normal wolf teeth but *under veterinary supervision*. They are not allowed to sedate your horse (unless your vet has prescribed a sedation paste beforehand) or prescribe pain relief, so should not remove any other teeth which would cause pain.



Bexfields Farm
Galleywood road
Chelmsford
Essex
CM2 8BY
01245 346904

admin@clarendonequine.co.uk

Common Dental Problems

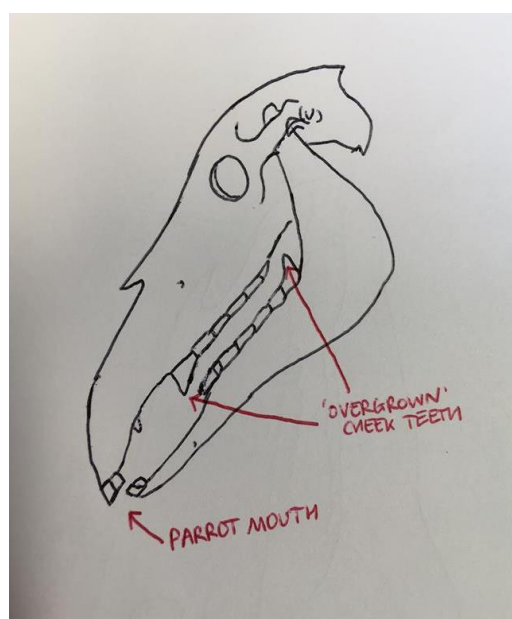
Sharp enamel points

Due to the way the horse's jaw fits together, with the lower jaw (mandible) sitting inside the upper jaw (maxilla), we often see sharp enamel points on the outside edges of the upper cheek teeth, and the inside edges of the lower cheek teeth. If allowed to progress these can cause pain when ridden (e.g. due to noseband pressure on the sharp points) or ulceration to the insides of the cheeks and the tongue itself.

These points can be easily managed by routine rasps and feeding your horse a diet with lots of roughage, such as hay.

Overgrown teeth

Technically these teeth are not overgrown, instead they are 'underworn' – usually due to malocclusion where there is no tooth opposite them to grind them down. As a result the crown height becomes much increased compared to the rest of the teeth and if allowed to get too long may cause soft tissue damage. These can happen with horses where the teeth do not line up together quite right, for example wry noses, parrot mouths, or overtly 'dished' heads, or if there is a displaced tooth or one that has been removed previously.



Pulpitis

These are often due to defects in the dentine of the tooth, which may expose the pulp, or from over-rasping and removing so much tooth as to expose the pulp. The sensitive pulp will become inflamed and die off, which is painful and also often a cause of apical (tooth root) abscesses. The risk of pulpitis is why we recommend all overgrown teeth are reduced very gradually – as pulp may only be a few millimetres away from the surface of the tooth.

Bexfields Farm
Galleywood road
Chelmsford
Essex
CM2 8BY
01245 346904

admin@clarendonequine.co.uk

Caries

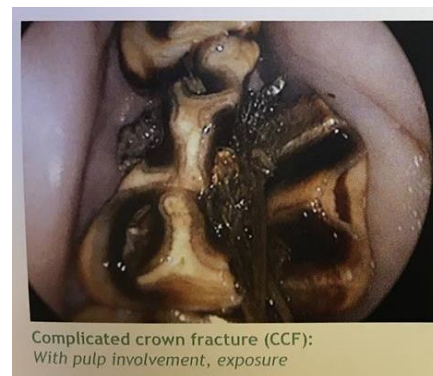
Also known as ‘infundibular hypoplasia’ – a failure of the tooth cement formation, this is the horse equivalent of tooth decay. Caries lesions can be graded from 1-5, with 1 being only the tooth’s cementum affected, and 5 being fracture due to the decay being so great that the tooth is no longer held together.



Fractures

Most fractured teeth are secondary to an underlying cause, such as caries. Sometimes they may be traumatic – especially with incisor fractures where the horse may, for example, be kicked or banged their head.

If there is no involvement of the sensitive pulp cavity then the fractured chip/slab can be removed, but if there is pulp exposure then the entire tooth may need removing.



Bexfields Farm
Galleywood road
Chelmsford
Essex
CM2 8BY
01245 346904

admin@clarendonequine.co.uk

Diastema

Diastema are gaps between the teeth, in which food can get trapped. This food will then cause the gums to become inflamed and painful, and if the diastemas are not cleared this can result in difficulty eating and infection. These diastemas can be regularly cleaned out to improve the health of the gums, and packing placed into the gaps. All overgrown teeth opposite should be reduced to minimise these 'driving' food into the diastema. If they are still being problematic the gaps can be surgically widened by a specialist.

Sinusitis

The roots of certain cheek teeth communicate with the sinuses – air filled structures within the skull of the horse. Therefore, if there is a tooth root infection, or a fracture, this can result in infection travelling up into the sinus. This will result in a painful horse that is feeling rather sorry for itself and nasal discharge from one nostril (the affected side). Sinusitis is diagnosed by x-rays or CT scanning, and it may sometimes not be obvious from the mouth alone which tooth is causing the problem.

Some cases of sinusitis will resolve with antibiotics alone, although a long course is often required, but others will require further management such as removal of the affected tooth, and possibly flushing of the sinus itself.

Wolf Teeth

Wolf teeth are small teeth found in front of the 1st molars – usually just on the upper jaw but very occasionally we find horses with them on the lower jaw as well or instead. There may just be one wolf tooth present, or a pair, or often none at all.

There is some debate as to whether wolf teeth are actually a problem – in some horses they are extremely close to the first molar or tucked alongside it, in which case the bit (if fitted correctly) is highly unlikely to make contact with the wolf tooth. The size of the wolf tooth also does not seem to be an issue – we certainly find some large ones in horses successfully competing! In the cases of wobbly/loose wolf teeth, or blind/unerupted wolf teeth we would generally recommend removal as these are more likely to cause discomfort. Removal can be performed at home using sedation, local anaesthetic and pain relief is given.

Thank you to The Equine Dental Clinic for allowing us to use some of their images – search for them on facebook for more information, videos and photos.

Bexfields Farm
Galleywood road
Chelmsford
Essex
CM2 8BY
01245 346904

admin@claredonequine.co.uk