

## The Basics of Equine Dentistry

**What is floating? Find out why horses' teeth require this care.**

*By Katie Olean*

An adult horse's teeth are not all that they appear. With a full length of about four inches, much of each permanent horse tooth is hidden within the jaw. In the days of roaming pastures, continuous grazing of rough material such as dirt, grit and silicate in grass would cause a horse's teeth to wear at a constant level. This constant wear made room for the average three to four millimeters of tooth that grows out each year.

With domestication came changes to the equine lifestyle, including a different diet and feeding schedule. Horses, with scheduled feedings eating softer grains and hays, now experience a different type of wear on their teeth.

Even under normal grazing conditions, horses' teeth tend to develop sharp enamel points. This is because a horse's upper jaw is naturally wider than his lower jaw. The sideways grinding motion during chewing causes points to form on the cheek side of his upper jaw molars and premolars and the tongue side of his lower jaw molars and premolars. Left alone, problems such as cuts in his cheeks and tongue, difficulty chewing and pain with a bit can result.

Fortunately, veterinarians have developed a technique to prevent this problem. Floating is the process of rasping or filing a horse's teeth to maintain balance and free chewing motion. Frequency of floating can differ from horse to horse and should be determined by regular dental exams at least once a year. Although practices may vary, most veterinarians will sedate the horse for this procedure.

To keep horses comfortable and utilizing feed efficiently, floating should be an essential part of any equine's overall dental maintenance.

### Further Reading

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