

# Teeth Facts

Like us, horses have incisors (sharp teeth) at the front and molars (grinding teeth) at the back.

Horses, like humans, have two sets of teeth. In infancy they have milk teeth and later they are replaced with permanent teeth.

The horse chews by moving its jaws from side to side. The molars grind the food and wear against each other. Because the lower jaw is narrower than the upper one the wear on the teeth is often uneven causing sharp edges to form. This can lead to discomfort when eating or when the bit is in the mouth. These sharp edges must be removed with a rasp by an Equine Dentist.

The horse has a full mouth of permanent teeth by the age of 5 and the teeth continue to grow throughout the horse's life – hence the expression 'long in the tooth'. The age of the horse can be determined by its teeth.

As the horse gets older and teeth are longer they often protrude more. The teeth change shape also which can cause gaps where food may get trapped. Horses don't often get tooth decay but occasionally get abscesses.

When a horse can't chew properly it drops food out of its mouth. This is called 'quidding' and is one of the signs that teeth need attention.

Horses teeth need checking every six months until they have a full set of permanent teeth. They are then checked on a yearly basis unless you suspect a problem. When a horse is old it may need more regular attention, also if eating becomes difficult.

Sign of a horse needing dental attention include:

- a) Quidding
- b) Weight loss – leaving food
- c) Colic – food not getting broken down properly for correct digestion taking place
- d) Shaking head
- e) Pulling at the reins – discomfort with the bit