Over the past few years, veterinarians and horse owners alike have become more and more aware of the benefits of appropriate dental care.

Dental equipment has improved decreasing the physical labor and refining the techniques involved in routine equine dentistry.

It was once taught that horses did not need their teeth floated until they were in their teenage years or later. We now know that, similar to humans, the most dynamic time in a horse's mouth is in their younger years (1½ – 5 yrs).

Looking for subtle abnormalities early in their life can allow for simple corrections avoiding major dental procedures later in life.

A horse's first oral examination should be at birth. Looking in a foal's mouth may reveal an abnormal bite that will have to be managed over time. After this initial examination the next oral examination should occur at 18 months.

Ideally a horse would receive a dental exam every 6 months until they are 10 years of age and then yearly after that unless abnormalities are present that require frequent care.

A horse may not need to have its teeth floated at every examination; however, any abnormalities of the teeth such as delayed eruption, misalignment, or sharp edges will be noticed and corrected before they affect other teeth in the mouth.

Horses' teeth erupt over time and wear down as they age. Once a tooth is worn or missing the other teeth will require more frequent care and the horse's ability to chew and digest food is compromised.

Frequent, careful oral exams can help you avoid unnecessary tooth damage and/or loss.

Signs that your horse may need an oral examination and routine dental care are excessive slobbering, dropping feed, turning their head to the side when they chew, weight loss in the face of adequate nutrition or a snotty nose from only one nostril.

Routine dental care involves much more than floating the teeth. It will encompass a complete physical examination and oral examination of your horse, as well as any dental procedure that is indicated based on the examination from floating or equilibration to tooth extraction.

Maintaining a healthy mouth through appropriate dental care is an easy way to extend the life of your horse. It is a perfect example of the old adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

This column is provided by the faculty of the OSU Boren Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital. The large volume of questions does not allow us to directly respond to specific email questions

so please watch for your answer in the column. Email your questions for the column to dvmon call@postoffice.cvhs.okstate.edu
and watch for your answer.

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