



HORSES for courses

WHY THE SUCCESS OF YOUR HORSE DEPENDS ON ITS TEETH.

Equine dentist Amanda Winstanley of Waimauku shares her vast knowledge about the dental health of horses. Jasmin Brandt watched Amanda in action on a call-out to Kumeu, where she performed dental check-ups on a number of horses on site. Amanda has been practicing in the Auckland area since May 2001 and regularly flies to Australia to further her knowledge through courses run by the Academy of Equine Dentistry.

“Most owners”, Amanda says, “underestimate the importance regular dental care plays in the overall health of their horses.” The neglect of the horse’s teeth leads to a number of significant problems, which affect both horse and rider. To give your horse the care it needs, it is useful to understand the special nature of their hypsodont teeth. Each tooth has a large amount of reserve crown under the gumline, which erupts at roughly the same rate that the teeth wear down. Once the horse reaches 18 years and beyond, the teeth are getting to the end of their life span.

It is of vital importance that the horse’s teeth get good wear and tear. Unfortunately, the environment horses are placed in these days is no longer natural. The small fenced paddocks do not have the full range of grasses and terrain that horses in the wild would have access to. Often, the horse’s diet is supplemented with processed food, which has no wear effect on the front teeth (incisors). Over time, the incisors may become so long that they prevent the molars from touching. This can result in abrasions to the cheeks and tongue due to the sharp edges of the teeth.

Furthermore, your horse will not be able to grind its food correctly due to the

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Amanda examines the 12 front teeth (incisors) of Chesterhope Shazam aged 24 years.

wrong position of the teeth. This will impact negatively on the horse’s digestive system because the food passes through the body without the horse getting the nutrients it needs. More importantly, partially chewed food has the potential to block the gut causing colic and worse.

An unbalanced mouth causes pain in the jaw joint and will impact on the performance of your horse. A horse’s instinct is to run away from pain. It will therefore react adversely when experiencing severe discomfort from the bit or from pressure applied around the head.

To encourage healthy teeth in your horse, Amanda Winstanley suggests feeding your horse on grass as much as possible. If you must give your horse processed food, make sure you place the bucket on the ground, not high up, as this interferes with the position of the jaws when chewing, resulting in malocclusions, namely hooks and ramps. Once the horse has developed these, it is impossible for the mouth to function correctly. Fortunately, the equine dentist

can easily fix the problem, usually with the help of power tools.

To ensure your horse stays in optimum health, Amanda recommends a dental visit at least once a year. Performance horses and under five-year-olds will require more frequent visits. If you are in doubt about when to arrange a check-up, see the list below or ring your equine dentist for advice:

BOOK YOUR HORSE IN FOR A CHECK-UP IF:

- you have just purchased a horse and not been supplied with its dental charts.
- your horse has an uneven or slanted smile.
- you have become aware of missing or protruding teeth.
- your horse eats slowly or drops a lot of food when eating; it eats with an up and down motion rather than an outside to inside diagonal motion; it is eating on one side of the mouth only.
- you have noticed bad breath or discharge from its mouth or nostrils.
- your horse has a habit of flicking or tilting its head when being ridden. 