

Tooth Care

All domestic donkeys need routine dental care, as they are not living on the ABRASIVE diet of their feral counterparts. Unlike human teeth, equine teeth are constantly pushing up through the jaw, and should wear with grazing at the same rate. For this reason holes or decay are not a problem as they just wear with the tooth and eventually disappear. However, various other tooth and mouth problems do occur, and should be treated. Tooth problems occur at every age so the donkey's teeth should be checked at least yearly, and preferably more often. As most farriers do teeth, have your farrier check teeth every other visit or so.

The incisors (front nipper teeth) do not as a rule cause any problems. However, the Molars, which are the grinding teeth, do. They tend to wear unevenly depending on the donkey's chewing action and very sharp edges can form which cut the cheeks and the tongue. The farrier (or vet) will rasp the sharp edges (called floating). This is painless to the donkey and most don't object at all.

Tooth shedding – the deciduous teeth (caps) can cause problems by not dropping out but sitting on top of the permanent teeth. This can result in an uneven chewing surface, food being caught in the teeth causing inflammation on the cap root spiking the jaw. The cap will need to be pulled out.

Missing Tooth - There is no grinding surface for the corresponding tooth so it will grow down into the hole. This is very painful (also unusual).

Wolf teeth – (not to be confused with the canine teeth found in jacks and geldings). The Wolf teeth (first premolars) are now missing in some equines. However, they do occur and cause biting problems. They usually require removal by a Vet!

Bolus - ball of unchewed food (usually due to caps) that sits in the cheeks and causes inflammation and must be removed.

Mouth Abscesses - are often due to seeds (especially barley awns) lodged in the mouth and tongue. The seeds will have to be pulled out, and the inside of the mouth hosed out. Uneven surfaces of the molars contribute to this problem.

General Signs of Tooth Problems – Sudden condition loss or variable condition. Eating problems. The donkey will drop food or be unable to chew properly resulting in bolus formation. Undigested food in the dung. Digestive problems such as souring or colic. Foul breath. Biting problems due to the bit or noseband pressing on sharp molars, causing head tossing. Drooling or excessive foaming at the mouth.

Old Age – Old donkeys need extra tooth care, as they are more prone to tooth loss due to infection than younger donkeys. Uneven wearing of the molars can occur due to deafness and blindness because both conditions can cause the donkey to chew unevenly. In extreme old age the teeth can wear down until they wear out. In such a case, soft feed and vitamins will have to be poured into the donkey. Donkey's teeth do seem to wear better and last longer than horses teeth, probably the reason why donkeys are more long lived.