

Dental care helps young horses perform

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At about the same time a young horse goes into training, it replaces its first teeth, said a Nebraska College of Technical Agricultural faculty member at a recent extension conference.

Assistant professor of veterinary medicine Cory Reng said that two- to four-year-old horses shed and replace all of their baby teeth. They often have a lot of problems during that transition period.

“They have enough problems learning how to be riding horses without having to fight dental issues,” Reng said, “so before the horse goes to the trainer, get its teeth done.”

Once that’s done, if those two- to four-year-old horses aren’t in condition, it’s probably a tooth problem.

A horse that isn’t reaching its full potential, isn’t able to collect and bring its body into position, may have a tooth problem, she said. A horse’s lower jaw has to move forward before it can “come into collection.” If the teeth won’t slide forward, neither can the horse. Sometimes the horse isn’t obstinate. Instead, its teeth may be locking.

Very few people open a horse’s mouth far enough to see the cheek teeth, Reng said. A horse’s teeth go all the way up underneath its eye and that’s a foot further than you can see. It will be the behavior of the horse that will give you the idea that it needs care.

Often the owner has identified a problem before getting veterinary attention. Dental corrections should show results almost immediately, although sometimes it will take a couple of days for the horse to get used to its new teeth, Reng said. That’s because the dentist often makes a lot of changes in the height and angles of the teeth. The horse should show improvement in a week at most.

Usually, the equine dentist will come to the horse, Reng said. The horse will be more comfortable at home.

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Signs of trouble will appear before classic dental symptoms. Reng says she often hears people say their horses drop food and drool.

“How bad do your teeth have to be before you start drooling food out of your mouth?” she asked.

Watch your horse’s behavior and condition and use a little preventive medicine before they start training. The result will be a healthy horse that will live a long, productive life.