

### What Is Periodontal Disease?

- Have you ever gotten a piece of food stuck between your teeth that drove you crazy until you removed it with floss? Your horse can't floss, and must continue to eat, altering how he chews to avoid the painful spot. The gums become inflamed and bleed easily, and more food becomes packed into this vulnerable area.
- Dental imbalances result in uneven pressure on teeth, causing the teeth to shift apart slightly. This allows food to get trapped, which then decays and causes painful infection.
- Infection starts to break down the tooth attachments, and if left untreated, the tooth will be lost. This is the number one cause of premature tooth loss in adult horses.
- Periodontal disease is common in older horses, especially those who have not had regular dental care.

### How Is It Treated?

- Periodontal disease is caused by dental imbalances such as overgrown teeth, and correction of these problems is the first step in treatment.
- Feed material and debris are cleaned out of the area with dental picks, forceps, and water irrigation.
- The infected area is then packed with antibiotics. If severe, dental impression material may also be used.
- In more advanced cases, the teeth are re-shaped to help decrease feed-trapping.
- In the most advanced cases, teeth may require extraction due to severity of infection.
- It is important that periodontal disease is diagnosed and treated early for the best possible long-term results. If caught early, we can reverse the damage or at least keep it from worsening. If left untreated, it will result in the premature loss of the surrounding teeth.
- The goal of treatment is a healthier, better functioning mouth and ultimately a happier, longer-lived horse.
- **Treatment is required every 6 months.**

### Can It Be Prevented?

- Regular dental care (equilibration or "floating") will help keep the mouth healthy and prevent periodontal disease. This requires a full examination with sedation, and the use of specialized equipment such as a mouth speculum, mirrors, picks, and a bright light to identify areas that require precise treatment.
- **Dental work should be performed once a year for most horses, and every 6 months for horses with dental issues.**



Periodontal pocket with feed packing deep into the gums



Overgrown tooth, a common cause of periodontal disease



Severe periodontal disease with spaces (diastema) and feed packing