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SHARPEN YOUR SHOW-JUMPING SKILLS

An eventer's guide to more double-clear rounds

By Sara Kozumplik Murphy and Brian Murphy ■ Photos by Amy K. Dragoo

Many American eventers readily admit that stadium jumping is their weakest phase. Yet today's medal winners—from countries like France, Germany and Great Britain—all look like they could walk into a jumper ring and not appear out of place. Some top U.S. eventers, such as 2018 World Equestrian Games competitors Lauren Kieffer and Will Coleman, are beautiful show jumpers, but as a whole, our skills are far behind those of other countries. It's time we Americans take a look in the mirror and set the bar higher for ourselves.

One factor helping us to do this is the U.S. Equestrian Federation's eventing show-jumping course advisor, Richard Jeffery. He's pushing course designers around the country to raise their standards. Now as good as any in the world, our courses at all levels are very fair to the horses—not trapping them into making mistakes—but much more tech-

Leave the rails up in competition by practicing finding your ring canter, riding from the center of each jump to the center of the next, and getting the correct number of strides in related distances.

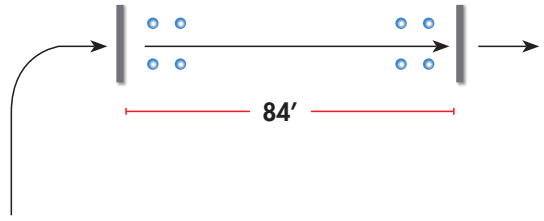
ABOUT THE MURPHYS

International eventer **Sara Kozumplik Murphy** rode in her first Rolex Kentucky Three Day Event at age 20 on an off-the-track Thoroughbred named As You Like It. In 2009, she was named to the U.S. Eventing Team short list. In 2017 she and Rubens D'ysieux finished second in the Bromont CCI*** and won both the $15,000 Ocala Horse Properties Eventing Prix, hosted by Southern Cross Equestrian, in Florida, and the inaugural $50,000 Arena Eventing class at the Devon Horse Show in Pennsylvania. A graduate "A" Pony Clubber and United States Eventing Association-certified instructor, Sara is a popular coach and clinician. She coached the Venezuelan event team at the 2013 Bolivarian Games in Lima, Peru, and the 2014 Central American Games in Veracruz, Mexico.

Sara's husband, **Brian Murphy,** is an Irish show jumper who represented his country as a junior at the grand-prix level before moving to the U.S. in 2006. Now focusing on teaching, training and sales, he is known for his excellent "eye on the ground," helping riders of multiple disciplines to improve their skills and become more competitive. Brian also gives clinics to students from across North America.

They are based at Overlook Farm Equestrian Center in Berryville, Virginia.

Exercise 1: Straight Line with Chutes



To practice the skills needed for a successful stadium round, set a six-stride line and place a chute of markers on the landing side of the first jump and another on the takeoff side of the second. For less-experienced horses and riders, start with wider chutes than what is demonstrated in the photos on page 5.

Natasha Erschen establishes a forward, rhythmic ring canter before turning her 16-year-old Irish Sporthorse, Fernhill Flutter (Butterfly), toward the line. Once straight to the first jump, she aims for its center.

In the air, she stays balanced over her feet and quiet in her body and hands, so Butterfly can focus on the job ahead of him.

TIP

Plan your track from the center of each jump to the center of the next one.

nical. There are twice as many related distances—jumps set on straight or bending lines with eight or fewer strides between them—than we used to see. So it's easier to knock down lots of rails.

The Solution

Fortunately, we're surrounded by jumper riders who know how to ride these courses. The U.S. has some of the world's best grand prix riders. More eventers need to tap into the incredibly successful hunter/equitation system that produces them.

But wait, you're thinking, event horses are different from hunters and jumpers. They have to be so bold on cross country; we don't want them to become supersonically careful over their fences. True. But we *can* teach them to be more careful than they are now without diminishing their courage. To do so, though, we need to improve our own skills. When a horse hits a pole, he learns to jump more carefully next time *only* if he isn't blaming the rider for getting in his way. Hunter/jumpers can teach us how to make that happen successfully.

Keep in mind: Eventers tend to overcomplicate things. Even at the four-star level, the jumps aren't high enough to demand the extreme accuracy required of grand prix riders, so you don't need to learn all the subtle, sophisticated techniques they use. Instead, focus on mastering the fundamentals: Ride in a proper ring canter in rhythm and balance from the center of each jump to the center of the next one, get your "numbers" (the correct number of strides in related distances) and get out of your horse's way. Here's what you need to know to achieve all three of these goals.

Find Your Ring Canter

As good as eventers are at galloping across country, many ride around stadium courses too slowly and "backward" (with too much hand), often adding more strides in a line than a pure show jumper would. There's a common misconception that a "slow clear" is better than risking having a rail down. In the past, timing was more erratic and the optimum time was often easy to achieve, but that's no longer the case in today's courses. You need to ride forward to make the time. And incurring four penalties for being four seconds slow is just as bad as four penalties for a rail down.

When we ask new students for a ring canter, nine out of 10 pick up either a long, lopey canter stuck in neutral or a canter with a 10- or 11-foot stride. Most of them just need to add 1 "mph" to the pace—they don't need to be flying around the ring. A good ring canter is smooth and rhythmic, yet also adjustable. That's where your dressage comes in. Strive to produce the same steady, flowing, harmonious picture in the show-jumping ring

Exercise 1: Straight Line with Chutes (continued)

As they canter straight through the middle of the first chute after landing, Natasha maintains a steady rein contact, but she still allows Butterfly to resume the forward ring canter that he had in the approach in order to produce six even strides.

To maintain his balance, she drops her weight into the saddle and brings her shoulders back. This allows her to soften the reins as they enter the next chute, perfectly set up to jump the center of the second fence.

Next, planning to ride the line in seven strides, Natasha approaches the first jump in a slightly more collected—yet still forward and rhythmic—canter. Once they jump the fence and exit the first chute, she will drop her weight into the saddle and half-halt, asking Butterfly to shorten his stride.

This allows her to add the seventh stride and still soften her contact as they enter the second chute. Once riding the line in seven strides feels good, she'll try opening up Butterfly's stride a little and canter the exercise in five strides.

that you aim for in the dressage ring.

In competition, the first jump on course is usually a very forgiving shape, which means that you can ride to it with plenty of pace without worrying about knocking a rail down. So plan to start each round in your ring canter.

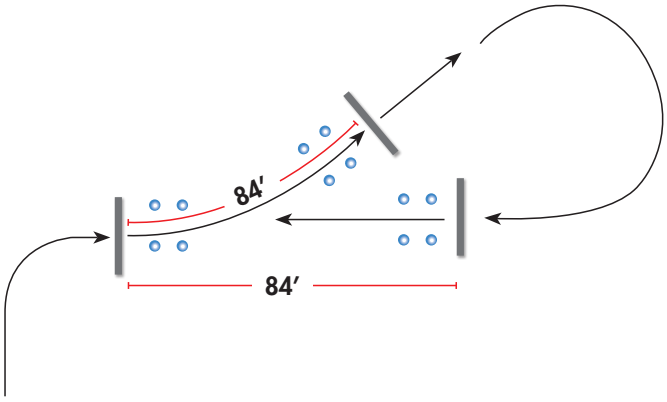
Ride Center to Center

On cross country, eventers rely a great deal on instinct. If a horse jumps too big or too quietly into a three-stride turning combination over two tables, we allow him to shift a little right or left off his line to make up the difference in the distance. Carrying this habit over into stadium jumping, however, can mean more rails down. To jump in his best-possible form, your horse needs to square his body to the fence so he can push off both hind legs evenly and power his body upward, not sideways. If he gets in the habit of shifting slightly right or left on takeoff, he'll learn to lean onto one shoulder or the other or push more off one hind leg than the other. Allowing him to do this repeatedly at home teaches him that it's OK to cheat in this way. Then, in competition, he won't "sit down" correctly (rock his weight back onto his hindquarters on takeoff) and jump in a proper shape, so he'll be more likely to have rails down.

TIP

Measure striding in related distances based on a 12-foot stride.

Exercise 2: Bending Line to Straight Line



For this exercise, set a third fence on a six-stride bending line from the first jump of the straight line and add another chute of markers on its takeoff side.

Natasha approaches the first fence just as she did in Exercise 1: in a forward, rhythmic ring canter. In the air, she again stays balanced over her feet and quiet in her body and hands.

Measure Your Steps

To learn to walk lines accurately, use a measuring tape to mark a distance of 12 feet in your arena at home and teach yourself to cover 3 feet with each step so that you walk the measured distance in four steps—that's one horse stride. When you walk your courses, stand at the landing side of the first jump of each line with your back to it and your heels against its base, then count your steps to the center and base of the next jump, noting the number of strides with each fourth step: "One, two, three, ONE [stride], one, two, three, TWO, one, two, three, THREE." Subtract one stride to account for takeoff and landing.

As they canter through the first chute, she turns her eyes to the left, planning the curved track to the next jump.

If, on the other hand, you insist that he jump the center of each fence at home, he may knock rails down if he's a bit lazy or hasn't developed a correct jumping technique yet. But that will teach him to be more careful. Event riders worry too much about knocking down rails at home and in the warm-up. If you're consistently doing everything else right, these knockdowns are a good reminder to your horse to polish up his jumping technique. This doesn't happen overnight, though. Horses who are still learning the proper style often try different things before finally getting it right. For example, it may take three or four attempts on the same line. If your horse makes one mistake and knocks a rail down, he might make a *different* mistake the next time. The key is to give him the same ride each time until he figures it out.

For every stadium-jumping round, plan to ride a certain track, or line, from the center of each fence to the center of the next one. No matter what happens, don't deviate from that plan! When a distance is a little too long or too tight—adjust your *canter,* not your *line.* We'll explain how to do that next.

Get Your Numbers

The more accurately you ride each related distance, the closer you'll get to ideal takeoff spots and the easier it will be for your horse to clear the jumps. Today's course designers base these distances on a standard 12-foot stride, allowing about 6 feet each for takeoff and landing (depending on the height you're jumping). That means that a one-stride will be 24 feet, a two-stride 36 feet, and so on, regardless of whether the jumps are on a straight or bending line. Everything makes sense; there's no guesswork. If you practice measuring and walking lines at home

Exercise 2: Bending Line to Straight Line (continued)

Following that track, she drops her weight into the saddle, asking Butterfly to maintain his rhythm and stride length. This brings them to the next chute in a good balance.

After jumping the second fence, she turns right and circles back to the second fence of the straight line she rode in Exercise 1, planning to ride it in the opposite direction.

In the air, Natasha and Butterfly are already focused on the final element of the exercise. As they land and canter through the first chute, Natasha will sink her weight down into the saddle, asking Butterfly to maintain his rhythm to …

… the next chute. As before, she stays connected to him with her seat and legs but softens her hands, allowing him to prepare for a good effort over the jump. After jumping the fence, she will bring him to a halt on a straight line and praise him.

based on these distances, then you can predict how many strides you should plan to ride in each line of a course. For more tips on walking lines accurately, see the "Measure Your Steps" sidebar on page 6.

Many other variables—such as a spooky jump, strange lighting, small arena (which can make horses feel claustrophobic and shorten their strides)—can influence how easily each distance rides in the expected number of strides. Over time, you will learn to anticipate some of these effects, but your primary job is simply to be prepared to react appropriately to any situation that changes how a distance is riding in that moment.

For example, if you arrive at the first jump of a five-stride line a little quietly, upon landing you need to close your leg and ask your horse to lengthen in the next stride or two so that the third, fourth and fifth strides can be normal. Ideally, he will even slow down slightly in the fifth stride, gathering himself to rock back onto his hindquarters for a quality jump. If you don't address the distance problem early, you'll still be squeezing your legs in those final strides to close the gap, which will make your horse jump flatter.

A similarly quick reaction is necessary if you see a long distance to the first jump. As soon as he lands, you must stretch up tall and "whoa" with both hands—never seesawing your reins, which will ruin your straightness and risk a runout—to collect the stride immediately so you won't still be fighting to slow down on stride four or five, likely inviting a pole down. Great riders like two-time Olympic gold medalist Mark Todd get that done in a single stride so they can then be soft again, giving their horses every opportunity to jump the next fence in a good shape.

To respond to situations like this effectively, you need to de-

Seek Quality Instruction

In eventing, many skills carry over from one phase to another, but to become truly competitive you must work with people who are good in each phase. If you don't have the financial means or time to train with dressage and show-jumping instructors, make sure the eventing coach you select has a basic knowledge of all three phases and the competition results to back that up, both of students and personally.

velop your "eye"—your ability to adjust the stride as necessary to arrive at a good takeoff spot for each fence. Ignore people who tell you not to worry about distances. They're either uneducated or so naturally talented that they don't realize how effective their own timing skills are. If you don't have that natural gift, don't worry. You *can* train your eye. But you'll have to practice, just the way musicians practice their scales. For more in-depth instruction on how to improve your timing, read Geoff Teall's article, "See Your Distances," at PracticalHorsemanMag.com.

Get Out of the Way

Nine out of 10 rails occur due to rider error, such as pulling on the reins in the approach, throwing your upper body forward on takeoff or otherwise interfering with your horse's balance and concentration. In the approach to every jump, carry your hands—maintaining a straight line from your elbow to your hands to the bit—without allowing them to separate more than a few inches. Sit up tall with your upper body, giving your horse time to jump up to you. Then *let go!* Softening the rein contact on takeoff is crucial, giving him the freedom to use his body effectively. This is another critical skill carried over from dressage: Learning to execute a half-halt gives you the ability to let go.

Strengthening your lower leg is also invaluable, as that helps you to maintain your own balance in the air. Be aware, too, of how easily the weight of your head can throw your balance off. Momentarily looking up high to the sky before your horse lands can help you stay balanced so it's easier to organize the moment his feet touch the ground. As you land, think, "Get back on my canter, then get straight on my line."

TIP

On the takeoff to a jump, soften your rein contact to give your horse freedom to use his body.

One mistake that eventers often make is closing the legs on the takeoff for every jump. This is effective on cross country, where we want to rebalance and then ride forward to the jumps. But in show jumping, it can cause your horse to hit the rail with a front leg because you've pushed him forward rather than giving him time to jump *up* with his front end. For this reason, jumper riders often lighten their legs considerably on the takeoff at verticals or square oxers without much width.

TIP

Concentrate on straightness: Take off and land on the same line.

Put It All Together

A good jumping instructor will cover all of these basics in every lesson, but you can also practice them in very simple cavalletti exercises. Set up two cavalletti or small jumps on a straight, six-stride (84-foot) line. To be sure that you're truly riding from center to center, build chutes to ride through by adding a pair of ground poles or cones on the takeoff and landing sides of each cavalletti—about 10 feet away from it—parallel to one another and to the track. (To make the setup even simpler, you can build just two chutes: one on the landing side of the first jump and another on the takeoff side of the second jump.) Start with them quite wide—about a foot in from the ends of the cavalletti.

Canter back and forth over the cavalletti several times in six strides, always riding to the center of each one. Then try adjusting your stride to ride it in five, seven, eight, and if you're more advanced, even nine or 10 strides, trying to keep the rhythm steady and never changing your line. Even when you have to adjust your striding within the line, always try to do so smoothly.

Meanwhile, concentrate on straightness, trying to take off and land on the same line every time. You'll be surprised how hard it is to maintain this accuracy! As that improves, gradually bring the "chute" poles closer together (to no narrower than 4 feet apart).

When that's going well, practice the same exercise on a bending line. Then put it all together: Ride the bending line to the straight line and vice versa.

Cavalletti are very low-impact exercises, so there's no harm in doing them twice or even three times a week on good footing, in addition to your regular show-jump schools. Using them routinely is a great way to improve all the skills we've mentioned. It also helps to keep your horse "jumping fit"—strengthening the muscles he needs for jumping. Jumper barns almost always have one or two cavalletti exercises set up in their rings.

Remember, keep it simple and seek quality instruction. As your fundamentals improve, your jumping coach can help you finesse the rest of your competition strategy, for example, by creating a warm-up plan to suit your horse's specific needs.

Finally, we highly recommend "practicing under pressure" at local hunter/jumper schooling shows. If you have a tight budget and/or schedule, consider replacing one of your planned events with a jumper show. This small investment will pay off with valuable clear rounds at future events.

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BANISH IMBALANCES IN THE MOUTH

Learn how a balanced mouth can help improve your horse's quality of life as well as boost his performance under saddle.

By Scott Wilson, DVM

Does your horse
- have trouble holding his head straight when ridden,
- have difficulty bending to the left or right,
- chew on the bit or excessively or turn his head when consuming grain,
- eat slowly or drop a lot of hay out of his mouth when eating,
- or act head shy or resist when receiving oral deworming paste?

These and many other behaviors could be signs that your horse is in need of dental care from a qualified and experienced professional. As an equine veterinarian who focuses only on dentistry, I have found there is a lot more to dentistry than just grinding off the sharp enamel points. In this article, I will describe the common problems that many horses develop within their mouths and how these issues affect their ability to chew and to remain comfortable while being ridden. Proper care can improve their quality of life and extend the lifespan of their teeth. The underlying causes of many of the conditions discussed are complex and, in some cases, still not completely understood by the veterinary community, although we're hoping that ongoing research will shed some light on the issues.

COURTESY, DR. SCOTT WILSON

Anatomy Review

To have a better idea of the types of dental problems that can arise, it's helpful to have a basic knowledge of the anatomy of the horse's mouth. An adult horse can have as many as 44 teeth, depending on the individual. Males typically have only 40, while females generally have only 36 because they tend not to develop the four large canine teeth that the bit rests near.

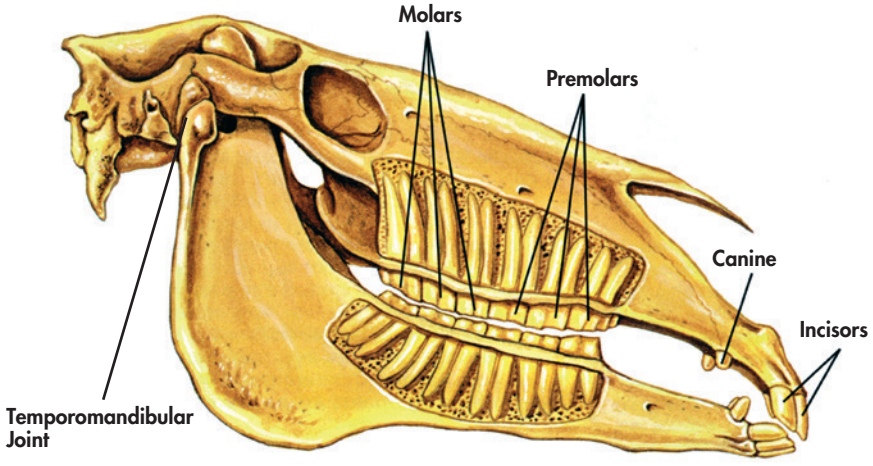
Horses have 12 incisor

Erupting vs. Growing

In the world of equine dentistry, the term "erupting" is different than "growing." By the time a horse is 2–4 years old, his teeth are at the maximum length, but they have a very long root. Throughout the horse's lifetime, the teeth are constantly being pushed into the horse's mouth from the root area at the same time they are being worn down. This is why older horses have shorter roots and tend to lose more teeth.

Canine teeth are the single, large teeth that are located between the incisors and cheek teeth. Shortening them is not recommended because of their increased risk of fracture and the likelihood of damaging their internal structures.

Wolf teeth, if present, are located in front of the first cheek tooth. Some horses do not develop wolf teeth, but if they do, they can fall out on their own or are generally removed at a young age, as they can be a cause of discomfort when the horse is bridled. This is usually a result of their sharp tip and their small roots, which allow the tooth to wiggle when pressure is applied. Care should be taken not to fracture the root when this tooth is extracted; specialized tools are available to help your veterinary dentist accomplish this.



A lateral view of the horse's skull

teeth—six upper and six lower—which are used primarily to grasp forage and grain, transferring them to the tongue and then onto the cheek teeth. There are a total of 24 cheek teeth, with six upper teeth and six lower teeth on each side of the head, whose main function is chewing. The cheek teeth consist of three premolars and three molars in each row, also called an arcade. The most efficient chewing motion for the horse that will promote balance, comfort and appropriate wearing of the teeth is a side-to-side motion with both the left and right sides of the mouth being used equally. Horses are able to chew on only one side of their mouth at a time. When horses chew on the left side of their mouth, for example, the cheek teeth on the right are quite far from touching. Over the first 20–30 years of a horse's life, his incisors and cheek teeth are almost always continuously erupting and grinding against one another.

Sharp Enamel Points

The most commonly addressed issue in a horse's mouth is sharp enamel points on the premolars and molars. On the upper teeth, they are located on the side of the teeth nearest the cheek and on the lower teeth, they're on the side of the teeth nearest the tongue. When sharp enough, these points can result in trauma to the tissues of the mouth, commonly called ulceration. The process of floating teeth is the act of using a grinding tool to smooth off these points. In my experience, horses tend to demonstrate specific behaviors while chewing and being ridden when they have these sharp points, such as:

- turn their heads sideways or open their mouths and stretch them when eating.
- show some degree of resistance to the bit, especially when the noseband is tight.
- flip their heads or excessively chew on the bit.

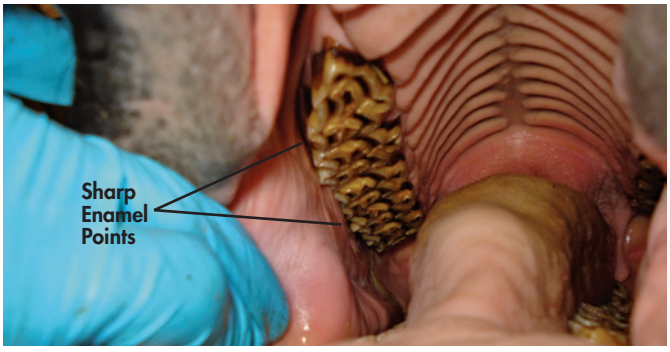
Effects of Imbalance

Although sharp enamel points are usually the most common issue horse owners are concerned about, they are not the most important aspect of equine dentistry. The chewing surface of the cheek teeth of horses should be balanced so they are relatively level from the first tooth in the row to the last. This allows the arcades of the cheek teeth to function properly, lets the horse chew comfortably and efficiently and promotes appropriate wearing of the teeth. Imbalance, or the loss of that level surface, of the arcades of cheek teeth usually results from a number of abnormalities.

Abnormally formed teeth, misaligned teeth and many other issues will dictate how the upper and lower teeth grind upon each other, potentially resulting in overgrown areas along the rows of cheek teeth. These overgrown areas, commonly referred to as ridges, ramps, hooks, waves or steps (depending on the location and type of issue), can restrict chewing motion, develop gaps between teeth with feed-packing and cause fractured teeth, prematurely worn teeth and many other health and comfort risks.

A small imbalance on the cheek teeth can turn into a significant issue within just a few months, especially in a younger horse. This is one of the main reasons that a yearly or biannually dental examination with attention to the causes of these imbalances is so vital.

Points Before



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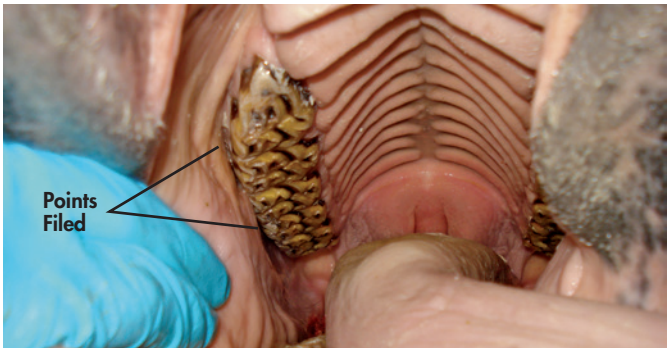
Sharp enamel points, on the side of the teeth near the horse's cheek, can cause painful sores on the tissues of the mouth.

Points After



An experienced equine dentist or veterinarian can float, or smooth down with a grinding tool, the sharp enamel points to make your horse more comfortable, especially while being ridden.

Types of Imbalance

There are many types of damaging imbalances that can occur in a horse's mouth, most of which result from overgrown areas due to an issue that can be corrected by timely, appropriate dental care.

■ Hook: An overgrown area on the first cheek tooth.

■ Ramp: If a horse tends to develop a hook, this usually indicates a type of alignment of the teeth that will result in a ramp in the opposite arcade on that same side. A ramp is an overgrown tooth at the back of the mouth that restricts the horse's ability to chew side to side, resulting in an abnormal open-mouth chewing motion. Owners will often see their horse drop large amounts of feed when this is the case. A quick look in the horse's mouth usually does not allow the practitioner to see all the way to the last tooth to identify any ramp overgrowth; a sedated exam with equipment to hold the horse's mouth open is required to assess the degree of overgrowth.

■ Waves and Steps: A wave is described as an overgrown area spanning multiple teeth, opposed by overworn teeth. This usually occurs toward the middle of the row of teeth (arcade). A step is similar to a wave, except the overgrown area is limited to a single tooth. Both of these types of imbalance can also restrict chewing motion and can lead to health issues as described below.

■ Incisor Overbite/Underbite in Incisors: Horses also are prone to developing an overbite and, less commonly, an underbite on their incisors, which can sometimes lead to restricted chewing motion.

A horse may also have a restricted chewing motion if there is a painful area within his mouth or head or if there is a congenital defect or neurological issue. In my experience, the most common balance issue that causes restricted chewing is the presence of a ramp at the back of the mouth.

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Overgrown areas of a horse's teeth can restrict chewing motion, causing feed-packing, prematurely worn teeth and other health risks in a short period of time.

There is clinical evidence that restricted chewing motion or chewing on only one side of the mouth on a consistent basis will result in asymmetric chewing muscles on the outside of the horse's head as well as a potential for pain around the temporomandibular joint (behind the eye and below the ear, where the lower jaw connects to the skull, see diagram on page 11), although the latter has not been proven scientifically. In my experience, horses with restricted chewing motion usually have a resistance to bending or picking up a specific lead when being ridden. I have found that many of these horses receive regular chiropractic, massage or acupuncture treatments, but few show full benefit from these treatments until their mouths are properly addressed.

When a horse is presented for dental examination, causes of imbalance must be identified and any overgrown teeth should be reduced appropriately, even if he lacks sufficient sharp enamel points to consider him due for floating.

Dangers of Imbalance and Gingivitis

If imbalance advances far enough so that feed gets packed between teeth, then gingivitis, or inflammation of the gums, can set in. Gingivitis usually becomes chronic as the feed material is degraded by bacteria. The gingiva—gum—will lose some of its attachment to the tooth, which usually results in an even deeper space for feed material to become trapped in. Eventually, this can break down the periodontal ligament holding the tooth in place, loosening the tooth. This process is quite painful and can be the reason many horses are head shy or react to oral examina-

Tartar Before

COURTESY, DR. SCOTT WILSON

Harmful bacteria-filled tartar can accumulate on teeth, as shown here on this horse's canine tooth.

Tartar After

After tartar is cleaned from a horse's tooth, gingivitis, a painful inflammation of the gums, can sometimes be seen.

tion and floating, even with adequate sedation. If specific upper teeth develop infection around the roots, the potential for sinus infection can also exist.

Horses can experience feed-packing with associated gingivitis between the incisors as well. Ramps and hooks can also lead to feed-packing. As the overgrown last lower tooth presses against the last upper tooth, over time the lower tooth will be pushed from the front, so that it rocks backward. This chronic stress can be likened to braces on a person's teeth. Eventually the lower tooth will shift, opening a gap for feed material to become chronically entrapped in. The same process also can occur when a horse's hooks are left unaddressed. Once a space forms for feed material to become lodged in, this usually results in a chronic, painful issue for the horse if left untreated.

Usually canine teeth accumulate tartar, which should be cleaned by your veterinary dentist to reduce the possibility of gingivitis developing in that area.

The Importance Of Routine Care

Since the horse's teeth are not readily visible, unlike lameness, injury or overgrown hooves, they can be forgotten. Most owners are not aware of the abnormalities present in their horses' mouths and thus, these issues may not be addressed in a timely fashion. In fact, it seems many calls that I receive are for horses who have not been floated in years and are having difficulty eating, are dropping feed or having problems with the bit when ridden. In most of these cases, the problems are beyond repairing in one session or may even be so severe that fixing these issues is not possible.

An excellent way to give your horse the best opportunity for a comfortable, efficient set of teeth is to have them properly examined at an appropriate interval. My recommendation is as follows:

- Begin floating horses when they are 2 years old with biannual examinations with floating until age 5 (when all adult teeth should be fully in place).
- Horses 5 years old until roughly 7–8 years of age ought to be examined every 9 months.
- Horses roughly 8 years old to geriatric age (around 20 years old) are seen once yearly.
- Horses of geriatric age are generally seen twice yearly.

If horses in any of these age groups are known to have dental abnormalities, they should be seen at least twice yearly to attempt to manage or correct any issues.

Scott Wilson, DVM, *is the owner and founder of Mid-Atlantic Equine Dentistry, which services areas of Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina. He graduated from Virginia–Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine with a degree focused in equine health. His internship at Damascus Equine Associates in Maryland and residency at his veterinary school alma mater helped to prepare him for a career focused in equine dentistry. He enjoys educating clients about the importance of equine dentistry through daily appointments, speaking at seminars, clinics, Pony Clubs and to anyone who will listen. Dr. Wilson thanks Jack Easley, DVM, MS, ABVP, AVDC (Eq) for his contributions to this article.*

The Role of An Equine Dentistry Professional

- The person should always perform a thorough head and oral examination under sedation using an oral speculum to keep the mouth open, utilizing a light and oral mirror (or oral camera) to visualize the fine details within the oral cavity.
- He or she should prepare a detailed medical record describing any dental abnormalities.
- Any abnormal teeth or areas of teeth should be addressed (which may require X-rays or extraction of teeth).
- The mouth should be well balanced (without overaggressive reduction) and sharp enamel points should be rounded off.
- Incisor teeth require attention as well.
- Packed feed and tartar should be removed.

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