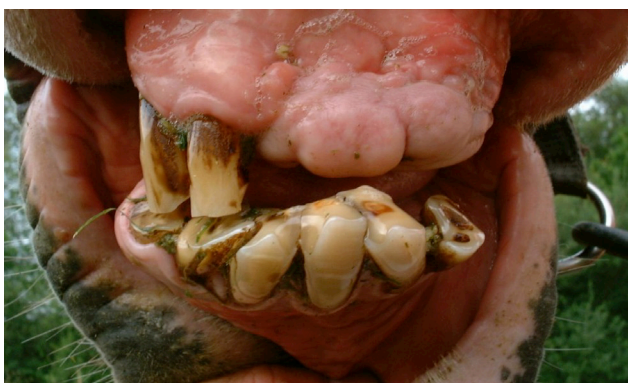


# Feeding Advice: The Older Horse

As horses age they begin to lose tooth enamel. This reduces the surface area available in their mouths for grinding forage (grass and hay), meaning that they can no longer eat efficiently. Often this manifests as 'quidding' (dropping balls of half-chewed hay) and/or weight loss.



An example of the teeth of an older horse

Regular routine dentistry (at least once a year) is essential. This will enable the removal of sharp enamel points and identify areas of enamel loss and tooth loss as the teeth wear with age - all of which may cause oral discomfort and reduce the horse's ability to eat.

Sometimes, despite regular dentistry, an ageing horse's teeth may struggle to cope with normal levels of forage. In these instances, eating can be facilitated by feeding alternative forms of forage, such as short-fibre roughage rather than normal hay, or adding water to hard feed to form a mash. This can help to maintain condition and keep the gut working normally.

**It is recommended that any dietary changes are introduced gradually over the course of 7 to 14 days in order to avoid any potential gastrointestinal problems.**

There are a number of quick-soaking high fibre feeds that are commercially available and these can be fed as a mash to facilitate chewing. These are usually well tolerated and palatable, but every horse is different and it may be a question of trial and error. Please contact your usual feed supplier for advice on which products they keep in stock. A balancer can also be added to these mashes to provide additional vitamins and minerals. Where weight loss is significant, vegetable oil (e.g. corn oil) can also be added to the mash to promote weight gain. Mashes are also a useful way to administer medication to an elderly horses where required (e.g. treatment for Cushing's/ PPID).



An example of soaked sugar beet

Although mashes can be fed year round, older horses may become less reliant on these mashes in the spring and summer as the fresh grass comes through. Grass is softer and easier to eat than hay, and most older horses appear to be able to chew grass even with advanced age related changes. It may be sensible to reduce the quantity of mash that you feed during the summer months to avoid the other extreme of excessive weight gain, and the potential increased risk of laminitis.

**For further advice, please contact us on 01638 663150 to speak to a member of our veterinary team.**