



# FACTSHEET

## Wolf Tooth Removal

### What are wolf teeth?

Unlike canine teeth, wolf teeth are not thought to have been used for fighting, but are thought to have been used historically for grinding food. However since horses diets have changed considerably over the past few hundred years, wolf teeth are no longer useful for grinding food and have therefore become very small in size meaning they serve no real purpose at all anymore.

### Where are they?

Wolf teeth are situated immediately in front of the premolar cheek teeth, usually on the maxillar (upper jaw). In some unusual cases wolf teeth have been found in the mandible (lower jaw) as well. Wolf teeth can be unilateral or bilateral.

### Are they present in all horses?

Wolf teeth usually erupt between the ages of 5-12 months old, although in some horses they may not erupt until as late as 6 years of age. They do not seem to be present in all horses, with approximately 70% of the population having them. There seems to be no association between sex and wolf teeth, with no difference between mares and geldings.

### Do they need removing?

This is a very controversial topic. A lot of horse owners will want wolf teeth removed prior to bringing a horse into work. This is because the horse's bit is thought to be in contact with the wolf teeth during ridden exercise and may cause behavioural difficulties when ridden.

However, there are many adult horses who have wolf teeth present and seem to have no difficulty accepting the bit or ridden work. The removal of wolf teeth therefore requires careful discussion with your veterinary surgeon and consideration. The removal of wolf teeth is often a perfectly justifiable procedure, however it is worth remembering that removal of wolf teeth in a naughty horse may not correct their bad behaviour!!

### How are they removed?

Wolf teeth should always be removed under sedation along with local anaesthetic and pain relief. Anyone removing wolf teeth without sedation is barbaric. Imagine having a healthy tooth pulled out at the dentist yourself without any form of anaesthetic, this will often lead to behavioural issues around placing the bit and administering wormers. Removal under sedation means the procedure is stress and pain free for the horse.

Once the horse is adequately sedated and anaesthetised, the wolf teeth are elevated away from the gum line and removed in their entirety. The horse is often given anti-inflammatory medication and rested from ridden exercise for 1-2 weeks.

### Tetanus Cover

All horses having their wolf teeth removed will require tetanus vaccination. Those not vaccinated will require Tetanus Anti-toxin which adds to the cost of the procedure.

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