EOTRH in Horses

Equine Odontoclastic Tooth Resorption and Hypercementosis

EOTRH is a progressive dental disease that primarily affects the incisor (front) and canine teeth of middle-aged and older horses. It is an increasingly recognised condition and can cause significant oral discomfort, sometimes before obvious signs are visible.

Early recognition is important to help manage pain and maintain your horse's quality of life.

The body progressively breaks down the structure of affected teeth (tooth resorption). At the same time, there can be an abnormal production of cementum, the mineralised tissue that normally covers the tooth root. These changes can weaken the teeth and affect the surrounding supporting structures, including the gums and surrounding bone.

The exact cause of EOTRH is not fully understood.

Clinical signs

EOTRH can be difficult to recognise in its early stages. Some horses show very subtle signs, while others may not show obvious discomfort until the disease is more advanced.

Signs to look out for include:

- **difficulty eating** - reluctance or difficulty biting into carrots, apples or other treats;
- **changes to the incisors** - discolouration, unusual enlargement, irregular surfaces or fractured teeth;
- **gum inflammation** - red, swollen or receding gums around the front teeth;
- **bad breath**;
- **drooling**;
- **difficulty grazing**;
- **head sensitivity** - resistance to having the muzzle or mouth handled;
- **weight loss** - particularly when eating becomes uncomfortable.
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In more advanced cases, affected teeth may become loose or fracture. Swelling, infection and draining tracts around the gums can also develop.

An important point: horses are very good at hiding dental pain. A horse that continues to eat normally may still have significant dental disease.



Figure 1 – Horse with visual clinical signs of EOTRH.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis involves a thorough oral examination performed by a veterinary surgeon.

Dental radiographs are particularly important, since these allow visualization of the structures beneath the gum line, where much of the disease process takes place. They can reveal changes in the tooth roots, areas of tooth resorption, abnormal cementum formation and damage to the surrounding bone.

This is important because teeth can appear relatively normal on visual examination while already showing significant changes on radiographs.

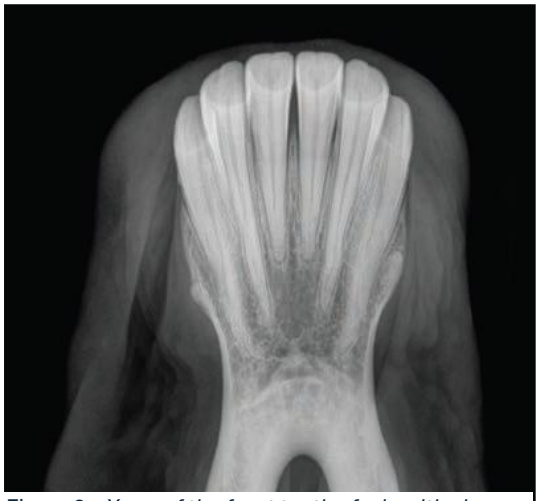


Figure 3 – X-ray of the front teeth of a healthy horse.

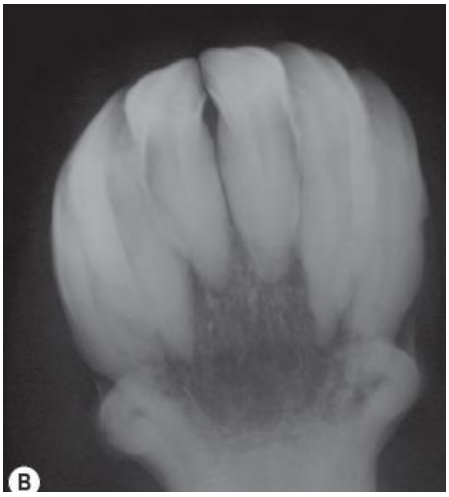


Figure 2 – X-ray of the front teeth of a horse with EOTRH.

Treatment

There is currently no medication or treatment that has been proven to stop or reverse the underlying disease process.

Treatment depends on the severity of the condition and the degree of discomfort experienced by the horse. In mild cases, regular veterinary monitoring and appropriate pain management may be considered. However, as EOTRH is progressive, affected teeth may deteriorate over time.

Extraction of affected teeth is currently the most effective treatment when they are causing pain.

The veterinary surgeon will assess the affected teeth clinically and radiographically to determine which teeth should be removed.

Although the prospect of extracting front teeth can be worrying for owners, it is important to remember that removing painful teeth can significantly improve a horse's comfort and quality of life.

Horses generally adapt remarkably well following the removal of their incisors. The incisors are primarily used for grasping and cutting grass, while the cheek teeth are responsible for grinding food. Following recovery, most horses learn to use their lips and tongue to pick up grass and feed. Some horses may require temporary dietary adjustments, particularly during recovery, but many return to a good quality of life and maintain their normal body condition.

Prevention

Unfortunately, there is currently no proven way to prevent EOTRH. Routine dental checks allow monitoring of the condition of the incisors and identify potential problems before they become more advanced.

When should you contact us?

If you notice changes in your horse's front teeth, swollen or bleeding gums, difficulty eating treats, or any signs of oral discomfort, we recommend arranging a dental examination.
Even if your horse appears to be eating normally, subtle changes can indicate an underlying problem.

Early diagnosis and appropriate treatment can make a significant difference to your horse's comfort and long-term quality of life.

If you have any concerns about your horse's dental health, please contact our practice. We will be happy to help.