

Dear Dr. Wise,

Who should I contact to have my horse's teeth floated?

There are two available options for teeth floating: equine dentists and vets with an interest in dentistry.

Equine dentists are laypeople who have received training to be able to float and place bit seats in your horse's mouth. Some of these people are very competent at what they do, but be aware that just because they are 'certified' doesn't mean that they are the best option. There are several benefits to using a veterinarian or a dental technician under the direct supervision of a vet.

First, a veterinarian is trained to recognize signs pointing to an underlying disease in your horse. In fact, before every dental exam, a vet should do a thorough physical exam on your horse. Also, a veterinarian has been trained to perform advanced dental techniques (such as tooth extractions). Second, vets are able to use and prescribe drugs. Some horses require sedation to have their teeth floated. Sedation makes the procedure less stressful and dangerous for both the practitioner and the horse. Vets can also prescribe antibiotics after the procedure if they think there is a risk of infection.

To complicate matters, some states have passed laws limiting all equine dental procedures to veterinarians or requiring a veterinarian is present when a layperson floats your horse's teeth. When deciding who to hire to float your horse's teeth, it is important to look up your state's laws regarding who can legally perform dental procedures on your horse.

The best person to contact for information would be your equine vet. Your vet should be able to recommend the best option in regards to someone who is comfortable and competent with equine dentistry.