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GumBits For Grinding

A powerful little helper.

By [Margaret Freeman](#)

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GumBits are expensive. Still, if your horse grinds you may find that they are worth every penny.

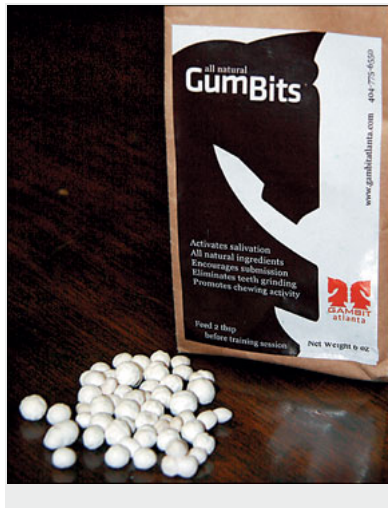
When people hear a horse grind its teeth, the immediate assumption is that the behavior is caused somehow by the rider. This generally isn't the case, at least not directly.

A product called [GumBits](#) is being marketed as a way to eliminate teeth grinding, plus it's supposed to promote chewing activity,

salivation and encourage submission to the bit. We decided to take a look to see if this product could really help these problems, but first we considered the cause of teeth grinding.

The vets we consulted said they felt teeth grinding is usually related to pain, or the anticipation of pain, and that the most likely source of the pain is ulcers. Part of the difficulty is that the behavior can become habitual so that, even if you find and ease the source of the pain, the grinding can continue.

There's an ugly cycle here. The horse becomes tense for some reason - training issues, rider problems, lack of turnout, trailering, equipment fit, injury, etc. The tension can lead to ulcers, and the ulcers themselves can cause tension. Even if you can clear up the ulcers, the horse may still fret over the original problem.



There are also degrees of grinding, "Fierce" grinding and "soft" grinding, if you will. A horse that gently chews the bit with a moist mouth is usually concentrating well on his job. A soft chewing sound coming from a horse that doesn't show other signs of tension, such as tail wringing or ear pinning, shouldn't be a concern.

You'll want to sleuth out the source of the tension or pain (or both) for a horse with fierce grinding. If you succeed, you may reduce or even eliminate the grinding. If the grinding becomes a habit, however, you're stuck with it. You then either turn a deaf ear or find a way to mask the grinding, especially for shows.

That's where GumBits could help. they're small, sweet waxy pellets that are fed to the horse before a riding session in the amount

of about 2 tablespoons, or a small handful. We tried the product on a varied group of horses with equally varied results.

Our Trial. The product's developer, dressage rider Elizabeth Kane of Atlanta, said they're made from food-grade confectioner's sugar, beeswax and fruity acids. We chewed some up ourselves before giving them to our horses. They were very mildly sweet and broke up

into waxy bits that got stuck between our teeth but didn't seem to stay on the surface.

After initial investigation, our horses weren't very impressed, even the confirmed treat hounds. One equine Corgi got a pretty good group going, shooting them all the way across the barn aisle, while most just dropped them on the ground, even if we added a lump of sugar as an enticement. We found a reliable way to get them into the mouth, and to stay there, was to stick them in the side one or two at a time after the horse was bridled. This worked OK even though it took some time.

We got very good results with a couple of horses, with no grinding for an entire riding session of an hour, and with consistent soft acceptance of the bit. One horse that doesn't care for treats and also tends to get his tongue over the bit, was wild for the GumBits and kept his tongue where it belonged. Another horse that is picky about treats also liked the GumBits and produced more foam than usual.

We hoped for soft chewing and foam production with one mare whose mouth is overly quiet and dry but saw no difference -indeed she made better foam with just a sugar lump. A couple grinders were muted a bit but not that much.

The other problem with GumBits is the price. [It costs \\$39 for a one-pound bag](#), plus shipping. That comes to about \$1.50 each for the 26 handfuls in each bag, which is pricey for daily use but may be worth it for shows.

Bottom Line. GumBits may be useful to mask the sound of teeth grinding for showing if this has become a confirmed habit with your horse. you'll have to try it out ahead of time to know for sure, since each horse seems to respond to them in a very individual way. First, however, try to determine if your horse has a source of pain or tension that is causing the grinding, especially if he suddenly takes it up as a new behavior.

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