

Common Turtle Diseases

Abscesses - Bacterial infections under the skin or in the tympanic membrane. Sterile abscesses can occur in the tympanic membrane or in the mouth with cases of Vitamin A deficiency.

Symptoms

1. Swellings behind the Tympanic membrane, in the mouth or on the feet
2. Nasal or ocular discharge
3. Anorexia

Diagnosis

1. Presence of a swelling with a pale yellow to white colored mass under the skin
2. Bacterial culture of swelling

Treatment

1. Surgical drainage and flushing of the abscessed area. The capsule of the abscess must be removed
2. Proper antibiotic treatment depending on culture
3. Vitamin A injection

Cuterebra Infection - Cuterebra larval imbedded in an open wound on the skin of one or more legs.

Symptoms

1. Open, draining wound on a front or rear leg
2. Subcutaneous swelling on a front or rear leg

Diagnosis

1. Noticing live larvae in breathing hole (opening in subcutaneous swelling)

Treatment

1. Surgical removal of worm and the entire capsule of the abscess created by the larvae
2. Antibiotic therapy following surgery

Prevention

1. Keeping turtles and tortoises away from rodent burrows in the yard

Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD) - commonly referred to as calcium deficiency by the general public and the novice veterinarian seeing pet turtles and tortoises. Is generally due to a combination of all or one of the following : Lack of UV Light, improper diet, lack of humidity or consistent below optimum cage temperatures. UV light must be supplied from direct sunlight (not thru glass or plexiglass) or by use of UV lights placed above the cage (unobstructed by wood, plastic or glass tops). Bulbs need to be changed every 6 months. Technically, MBD, is an imbalance of the Calcium / Phosphorus ratio in the blood. The ratio should be 2/1 or 3/1.



Symptoms

1. Softening of the shell of the underside (Plastron) and in severe cases, the top too (Carapace)
2. Muscle twitching
3. Anorexia
4. Deformity of the shell causing the sides to curve upward. Tortoises reveal a pyramid effect of the sections of shell on the top.

Diagnosis

1. Blood calcium and phosphorus level
2. XRAY

Treatment

1. Depends on calcium levels (needs to be under direction of a well qualified reptile veterinarian)
2. Change diet to that directed by a well qualified reptile veterinarian
3. Maintain pet in UV light daily for 1-2 hours for first month of treatment

Prevention

1. Use proper diet as directed in text from library or calling our office
2. Use proper UV lighting
3. See your Reptile Veterinarian Yearly

Shell Rot

Symptoms

1. Presence of inflamed areas of tissue directly under the surface of the shell. Severe cases may have pooling of bloody fluid just under the shell
2. Pitted areas of shell on the Plastron with adjoining areas of inflammation

Diagnosis

1. Physical exam revealing areas of inflammation under the shell

Treatment

1. Vitamin A injection

2. Antibiotic therapy
3. Correcting dietary and housing problems

Prevention

1. Having patient on the correct diet for that species
2. Creating a clean environment with adequate levels of UV light