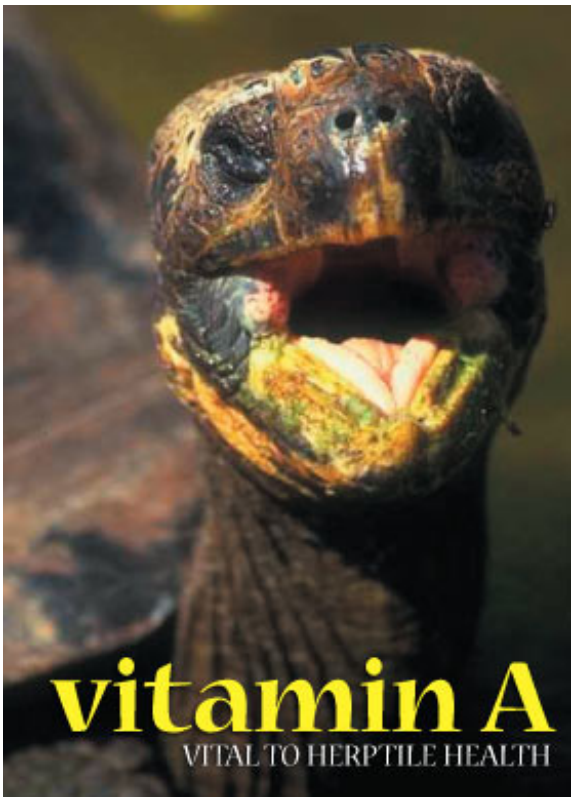
Hypovitaminosis A Prevention Tips

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Vitamin A is one of the fat-soluble vitamins. It is an antioxidant, helps in the growth and repair of tissues, and is important for proper functioning of the eyes, skin, mucous membranes, and ducts (small tubes which carry fluid from one tissue to another).

Although affecting mostly turtles and tortoises, any reptile can show the effects of Vitamin A deficiency. This disease, known as Hypovitaminosis A, results in a thickening of the lining of ducts, often blocking the flow of fluid through the ducts. This is most common in the tear ducts, and ducts in the pancreas and kidneys.

Reptiles fed iceberg lettuce, an all-meat diet, or a poor quality commercial diet are prone to develop a Vitamin A deficiency, since these foods have very low levels of this vitamin. The most characteristic sign of Vitamin A deficiency is swollen eyelids.Often the swelling is so severe that the eyes cannot even be opened. In severe cases of Hypovitaminosis A, the pancreas, liver, and kidneys can also be affected. Since other diseases can cause similar signs, it is important for the diagnosis to be made by a veterinarian.

Your veterinarian will need to know what your pet has been and is presently being fed, including any supplements, before a diagnosis can be made. A major part of the treatment will involve providing a nutritionally balanced diet developed specifically for the species taking into account whether it is a carnivore, herbivore, or omnivore.

Vitamin A supplements may be suggested and are preferable when given orally. If the condition is severe, Vitamin A will be given by injection. Care must be taken to not over-supplement, since Vitamin A toxicities can occur. Follow your veterinarian's directions carefully.

Other issues

Reptiles with a Vitamin A deficiency are often deficient in other nutrients as well, such as Vitamin E and zinc, so these nutritional imbalances also need to be corrected. If feeding a commercial diet, it should be fresh, and of high quality.

Secondary to Hypovitaminosis A, bacterial or fungal infections can occur if your reptile is lacking proper nutrition. In these cases, your veterinarian will most likely prescribe either oral or topical antibiotics, or give your pet an antibiotic injection. Make sure you

Some possible signs of Hypovitaminosis A:

- Swollen eyelids
- Loss of appetite

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address all husbandry conditions, such as the type of substrate you use and how often you clean and disinfect his cage.

Hypovitaminosis A is a completely preventable disease. Feeding the appropriate diet will ensure that your herptile is going to receive the daily requirements of Vitamin A. The diet should include commercial foods, animal protein, and dark green leafy vegetables. The earlier a case of Hypovitaminosis A is diagnosed, the faster the response to treatment and the less likelihood of permanent damage. Remember to consult your veterinarian immediately if you suspect your reptile is showing signs of Hypovitaminosis A.

- Loss of appetite and weight
- Raw skin with secondary bacterial infections
- Nasal discharge (runny nose)
- Abnormal development of the eyes in embryos

We Recommend

Reptivite
Complete vitamin, mineral, and amino acid complex.

Zoo Med's Aquatic Turtle Food
Specially formulated protein level, vitamins, and minerals ensure proper shell development and healthy internal organs.

ReptoCal
Powdered mineral supplement includes Vitamins A, B, D, and E.

ReptoMin Floating Food Sticks
Highly nutritious floating food sticks for aquatic turtles, newts, and African frogs.

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