

Common Ailments of Box Turtles



In captivity, it is almost impossible to imitate a box turtle's natural diet and because of this, illness results. The symptoms include swollen eyes, runny nose, no appetite and no energy. If your box turtle is seen sitting out all night or wakes up very early from hibernation you can be sure that he is not feeling well. Many times a LUMP will be noticed on one or both sides of the neck.

Since we believe that most illnesses are caused by a lack of Vitamin A in the diet, the treatment consists of soaking the turtle in a pan of warm water with a few drops of Vitamin A in the water. The water should be no higher than the turtle's nose and in winter, he should remain in the water for about an hour and much longer in summer, perhaps up to two full days or more since dehydration can produce the same symptoms. An antibiotic ophthalmic ointment should be put into the eyes (if swollen) one to three times a day. A mild salt-water solution may also be applied gently with a Q-tip. Recent information says that you can squeeze the contents of a Vitamin A capsule into the eyes for relief. I've tried it and it seems to help.

If no improvement is seen in two weeks, try to put a few drops of the Vitamin A directly into the turtle's mouth but BE CAREFUL. He could inhale it into his lungs. Let the drops fall into the side of

the mouth. Sometimes you can get him to open his mouth by pulling out a front leg. This triggers a biting reaction. Otherwise, try to pry open the mouth carefully using the point on the CAP of a Bic pen or an orange stick used for manicures. Never use a sharp object. The turtle must be kept warm at all times during treatment and should not be allowed to hibernate.

BE PATIENT!! It is not unusual for the treatment to take up to three months to work. Keep trying and go to a VET if the situation worsens considerably.

NECK LUMPS are best treated by a veterinarian or a person knowledgeable about them. Treatment generally consists of letting the lump "ripen" (it gets very hard and white looking) and then making a slit with a razor and pushing out the cheesy-like matter. The wound must be kept open and draining for about a week. Each day, soak the turtle for awhile and then wipe the wound with a Q-tip, getting out as much of the matter as you can see. The cap of the Bic pen can also be used as a tool for pushing on the outside of the wound to try to push the matter to the surface. An antibiotic ointment or Betadine solution may be used on the wound but I find that it deters healing.

A sick box turtle should be placed in a large cardboard box with a heating pad set on "low" - underneath part of the box. A clamp-on light with a 40 or 60 watt bulb should be used during the day for extra warmth and if the turtle is to be kept indoors for an extended period of time, A Vita-Lite may be used but **ALWAYS** provide a hiding place for your turtles.

Box turtles are native to the east and mid-western states. They are collected from the wild in massive numbers each year and shipped to wholesalers, pet shops, etc. all across the U.S. Many are shipped overseas to England where their slow deaths are ensured. By the time you buy one, you can be sure that the box turtle has suffered severe stress from his ordeal. A lot of TLC (Tender Loving Care), understanding, good food, fresh water and fresh air and a proper PEACEFUL environment will go a long way towards keeping him healthy or restoring his health.

