

HYPOVITAMINOSIS A IN TERRAPINS

What is it?

- Hypovitaminosis A is a deficiency caused by low levels of vitamin A in the diet
- Vitamin A is important for the normal function of the skin, respiratory tract and eyes.
- In the wild, in addition to a wide range of invertebrates and other animal matter, most terrapins will eat plants containing carotene which is then converted to true vitamin-A in the body. In captivity, diets deficient in plant material such as shrimps or some dried turtle mixed food can lead to low vitamin A.

Who can get it?

Species such as musk or map turtles, red-eared and yellow-bellied sliders are most commonly affected.

Signs of hypovitaminosis A

- Dull or depressed behaviour
- Decreased appetite
- Weight loss
- Swollen eyes/conjunctivitis
- Dry patches/sloughing of the skin
- Runny nose / blocked nostrils
- Inflamed gums
- Breathing problems

Prevention

Ask your veterinarian about appropriate diets and if necessary supplementation.

Dark green leafy vegetables like broccoli, spinach, dandelions, pak choi and orange or yellow vegetables like carrots, squash, sweet potato and sweetcorn are good sources of vitamin A for terrapins. Shrimps and dried turtle mixed food are poor sources of vitamin A, whereas some of the complete terrapin pellet diets may have vitamin A included.

Treatment

Prevention is the best treatment! Your veterinarian may recommend supplementation of vitamin A but many pets will need hospitalisation for further investigations such as blood tests and imaging, in addition to treatment for secondary diseases such as respiratory tract infections which develop as a result of low vitamin A.