

Beta Carotene and Lizards

Will certain vitamins help intensify the coloration of my lizard?

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I am trying to brighten my sandfire bearded dragon's color by spraying her greens daily with Nature Zone Liquid Color and feeding her plenty of carrots in addition to her regular diet. Is it potentially harmful for her to consume too much beta carotene?

Beta carotene is found in orange and yellow vegetables and fruits. Nutrients called carotenoids are all vitamin A precursors that are converted in the body to active vitamin A. The good news is that extra carotenoids will be excreted unchanged. Vitamin A can be overdosed quite easily. Because vitamin A is a fat-soluble vitamin, any excess will be stored in the liver (approximately 90% or more) for future use. But, beta carotene will be converted to active vitamin A. It is not stored and is excreted easily.

Plants do not contain any active vitamin A, but they contain the carotenoids. So, carotenoids in the diet do not contribute to potential vitamin A toxicosis because they won't be converted to vitamin A unless there is a metabolic need. At excessive levels, carotenoids may result in a temporary heightened yellow pigmentation of the skin and fat. This is what you are attempting to accomplish by using carotenoids orally. But you will only be able to temporarily heighten the pigmentation so much.

Since a bearded dragon's skin stretches very little, it will shed its skin (or molt) from time to time. As skin is being renewed, the supplemented carotenoids will continue to intensify the color of your sandfire beardie's skin color.

So, when you wrote in to me, I'll bet that you knew you could increase your beardie's color, but now you know why it works. It's safe, but it will only increase the coloration to a finite degree. They are beautiful lizards!