

## Chameleon Eye Problem

### Why does my chameleon keep closing its eye?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

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Chameleon by David Northcott.

I have a 5-month-old male veiled chameleon who keeps closing his right eye (mostly), but sometimes his left eye as well. A couple days ago I thought he was dying because he slept during the day, on and off, with his eyes closed. This was after some changes to the veiled chameleon's habitat. I moved the chameleon closer to the Reptisun 5 UVB light (5 to 6 inches away), the cage temperature went up a couple degrees (91 to 92 due to hot weather) and the humidifier failed. I lowered the cage temperature (to between 85 and 89 degrees Fahrenheit) and fixed the humidifier.

My veiled chameleon has perked up over the last couple of days and is moving around and eating. However, he still closes the right eye and is moving it around inside the lid and rubbing it. When I come into the room or feed him, he opens both eyes fine. He is hydrated. I cannot see anything in his eye. He does not have any discharge and does not appear to have a respiratory infection. I tried placing my veiled chameleon in the shower for 20 minutes but that did not help. He is in an 18 inch by 18 inch by 36 inch screened cage.

Do you think my veiled chameleon needs some vitamin A? If so, is there a way to give him some without taking him to the vet? I had another chameleon that was sick and the vet gave him .5 cc of vitamin A instead of .01 and killed him. Please let me know what you think. Thanks!

First off, let me say how sorry I am that you had such a bad experience with a veterinarian. I hope that you relayed this information about your chameleon's demise to the vet who gave him the vitamin A.

While I understand that you might be reluctant to visit another herp vet, based on your previous negative experience, the vast majority of veterinarians out there in practice are qualified, caring and extremely competent. There are several ways to locate a good herp vet. I have listed these at the end of this column.

Young chameleons can and do sometimes suffer from vitamin A deficiency. Fat-soluble vitamin A, is stored in the egg yolk and then in the liver, and within several months after hatching, vitamin A may become depleted by the chameleon's body.

Vitamin A is potentially toxic if overdosed, as you discovered in the case of your first chameleon. There is a vitamin A precursor, called beta-carotene, however, that is completely safe and non-toxic. Beta-carotene is converted in the body to active vitamin A and the unused portion is excreted unchanged, so it is a much safer way to deal with vitamin A deficiency (technically called hypovitaminosis A).

While I would never recommend that you attempt to diagnose and treat your chameleon without the benefit of veterinary assistance, I feel comfortable in suggesting that you can begin your chameleon on a beta-carotene supplement, as this technically cannot be overdosed. There are several formulations that are commercially available that can safely supply your chameleon with beta-carotene. Human pharmacies carry beta-carotene supplements for humans, and these can be used for reptiles, as well. Beta-carotene is supplied as a capsule that is filled with a red liquid, so it is simple to make a small hole in the end of the capsule and squeeze out a drop or two of the liquid, which can then either be administered orally, directly into the mouth, or it can be drizzled over food items. In some cases, I have even suggested that liquid supplements or other types of liquid medications can be injected directly into an insect for immediate consumption by the reptile.

You didn't specify if you are gut-loading the insects or dusting them with any vitamin or mineral supplements. Many reptile vitamin and mineral supplements contain either vitamin A or beta-carotene, which can be nutritionally beneficial. Also, in addition to offering your chameleon insects for consumption, veiled chameleons also consume vegetable matter. Dark green leafy vegetables, and also those fruits and vegetables that are orange, yellow or red contain beta-carotene.

The eye problem that your chameleon is experiencing could be something other than hypovitaminosis A, so I do recommend that you consider taking your chameleon in to be evaluated by a qualified herp veterinarian as soon as possible. It may take several weeks before the positive effects of beta-carotene supplementation become evident, so I wouldn't advise waiting that length of time to see if vitamin supplementation is helping. We are each only given one pair of

eyes and they are irreplaceable, and a blind chameleon will probably not thrive or even survive, as its hunting skills will be negligible. I have heard of an owner that hand-fed a blind chameleon twice a day for its entire life after it became blind, but that is a huge commitment. With the best-case scenario, your herp vet can diagnose the problem and prescribe appropriate medication, either topically (into the eye or eyes) and/or systemic therapy.

I certainly understand your reluctance to take your chameleon in to see another herp vet, but I really feel that you should take another chance with one. It would be the best way to ensure that your chameleon is given the best shot at diagnosis and recovery.

Check the Association of Reptile and Amphibian Veterinarian's website for members in your area. Or ask around to a few pet retailers who deal with reptiles and ask them what vets they use. You can also call veterinary clinics that don't deal with reptiles, and ask which veterinarians they refer herps to.

I have discussed repeatedly in my column the free consultation service offered by the larger veterinary diagnostic laboratories. Any vet who utilizes certain veterinary labs for testing can call in and request a consultation with a qualified herp vet, who is available to help with any specific case. No vet out there is alone as free help is a phone call away.

#### Need a Herp Vet?

If you are looking for a herp-knowledgeable veterinarian in your area, a good place to start is by checking the list of members on the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarian (ARAV) website at [www.arav.com](http://www.arav.com). Look for DVMs who appear to maintain actual veterinary offices that you could contact. Or, check out the state by state ReptileChannel Vet Listings.