

## Gasping Reptile

**It looks like my turtle is stretching out her neck and trying to swallow like she has something stuck in her throat. What could this be?**

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

It looks like my red-eared slider is stretching out her neck and trying to swallow like she has something stuck in her throat. She holds her front legs in like she cannot move them. My daughter and I just noticed this when cleaning her bowl this morning. She was fine yesterday. Our two sliders have been happy with pellets and romaine lettuce. This is what they had yesterday morning. Today, only pellets for the second one, which is doing well. There is no gravel in the bowl. We have added a piece of brick we found at the beach because it makes a great basking shelf. Just before this message, I noticed as she gasps, bubbles are coming out of her mouth and nose. I thought she was doing better because she was moving around a little bit. I guess I was wrong.

I fear that you have a very sick turtle. It doesn't sound as if you have your sliders warm enough if they live in a turtle bowl with only a brick. They need heated water, an air temperature of 72 to 85 degrees Fahrenheit and a 60-watt light bulb to create a hot basking spot.

The easiest way to heat water is with the use of a submersible aquarium heater. Tank water should be kept very clean, and the best way to keep the water crystal clear is by using aquarium filtration.

What you are describing with your slider sounds like pneumonia. Open-mouth breathing is always a very serious sign in turtles. If you notice this, your turtle requires an immediate trip to your herp vet for evaluation and treatment. When you take your slider in for examination, make sure you tell your vet very specifically what the conditions are for your turtles, including temperatures.

The diet you are feeding is good, but in addition to offering turtle pellets and romaine, you should vary it by offering snails, slugs, gut-loaded insects, fish, chopped mouse bits, cichlid pellets, trout pellets and earthworms.

I hope this message gets to you in time. Your little turtle is very sick and requires immediate veterinary care.

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### 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) web site at [www.arav.com](http://www.arav.com). Look for DVMs who appear to maintain actual veterinary offices that you could contact.