

## Herp Lacking Vitamin A

**I bought a baby turtle a month ago. She has been doing fine until today when I noticed that her eyes are not shining as usual. Her eyelids are somehow swollen. What's wrong?**

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

I bought a baby red-eared slider a month ago. She has been doing fine until today when I noticed that her eyes are not shining as usual. Her eyelids are somehow swollen. I put her in warmer clean water, and I added some isotonic saline. She is opening her eyes normally; there is no discharge. She is eating normally and swimming normally, so nothing worries me other than her eyes. Kindly advise me about what to do.

The most common reason for swollen eyelids in red-eared sliders is from a lack of vitamin A in the diet. This is called hypovitaminosis A. Hatchling sliders have some vitamin A stored in the liver. Once that is used up, if the diet does not contain adequate levels of vitamin A or beta-carotene (the vitamin A precursor converted in the body to active vitamin A), then the first sign usually is swollen eyelids.

Water turtles are some of the most difficult species to properly maintain, so please make sure you are housing your new baby slider properly and keeping it at the correct temperatures (both air and water). Make sure you have adequate filtration for the water and that you get it used to eating in a small, separate tank, which makes keeping everything much cleaner. Use a bulb as a focal hot spot for basking and a full-spectrum light that emits UVB. If necessary, use an aquarium heater to keep the water warm enough for hatchling red-eared sliders (75 to 82 degrees Fahrenheit).

You didn't say what you are feeding your turtle, but if you can get any commercial name brand turtle pellets or sticks, then you will be offering a base of balanced nutrients. Often, a turtle with hypovitaminosis A will also suffer from other nutritional deficiencies and imbalances.

If you can find a vet experienced in herp medicine, then it would be best to take your little turtle in for examination and treatment. Vitamin supplements are available if you can't locate a veterinarian who can help you. Cod liver oil is high in vitamin A, and if your turtle is still eating, you can put a drop on its food daily to provide the necessary vitamin A. Beta-carotene is also available in the form of a liquid capsule from human pharmacies. If you put a drop on the food several times per week, the turtle will convert what it needs to vitamin A, and the rest will be excreted unchanged, so it is very safe and nontoxic.

In addition to water turtle pellets, you should be feeding your turtle some small prey items, such as earthworms, slugs, snails and small fish. The snails, slugs and earthworms might need to be chopped up for baby turtles. Feeding a hatchling chopped-up liver and mouse parts is good. Feeding a variety of insects (crickets, waxworms, mealworms, flies, maggots and moths) is also good when they are the appropriate size for hatchling turtles. Because insects are calcium deficient and not very nutritious, they should be gut-loaded appropriately before being offered to a turtle. Dark-green leafy vegetables should also be offered, and cichlid pellets and trout chow are other options.

Hopefully, you will be able to solve the problem with your baby turtle's eyelids and it will completely recover.

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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.