

Turtle Shedding Skin

Why is my turtle shedding skin on its legs?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

Q. I have a male eastern painted turtle that is about 5 years old. Lately the eastern painted turtle has been shedding the skin on its legs. I know this is normal for aquatic turtles, but this time the skin is just hanging from the eastern painted turtle's legs. The eastern painted turtle appears to be shedding more than usual.

I use a UVB/UVA light and a water heater. I have not changed the turtle's food and I regularly clean the turtle tank. Do you have any suggestions as to what may be causing the overshedding of the eastern painted turtle and what I can do about it?

A. If the eastern painted turtle's skin underneath the sloughing skin appears normal, with no swellings, no red areas or white plaques, then I don't think you have anything to worry about. I am assuming that your turtle is on a good, balanced diet, is fed in a small container of water to avoid fouling the turtle tank and the turtle has a haul-out area to be able to bask and dry off if it chooses. You didn't say the eastern painted turtle was acting "off" or not eating, or acting differently, so I hope that is the case here.

There are several reasons why a turtle may slough the full-thickness of the skin, and they are all related to medical problems, such as thermal burns, chemical burns, trauma, bacterial infections (especially from anaerobic bacteria) or from injectable vitamin A administration and overdose.

If you think there is any problem with your eastern painted turtle, it would be best to take it in to see a herp vet for evaluation. You might also want to bring in a water sample from the turtle tank, as well as information regarding the temperature range, diet and any other pertinent data.

My gut feeling is that you are just observing a normal shed (ecdysis) of the eastern painted turtle, unless there are other abnormalities that you did not mention. I hope this helps put your mind at ease. But, if you are still concerned, don't hesitate to call your herp vet for an appointment.

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