



Lone Mountain

• • • ANIMAL HOSPITAL • • •



Stress and Illness in Reptiles

What is a healthy reptile?

A healthy animal's immune system keeps colonies of parasites, bacteria and fungi under control so that they do not interfere with normal bodily functions. Normal behavior varies between species, however, a healthy reptile is alert to its surroundings, thermo regulates during the course of the day, eats, drinks and defecates regularly.

For most reptiles, healthy skin appears rounded, filled out and full in color. Wrinkled skin may indicate dehydration. Shedding typically occurs every four to six weeks. Younger reptiles may shed more often during peak growing seasons and less often during slow seasons.

Unfortunately, most of the reptiles brought in the pet trade are unhealthy. Bring any newly bought or adopted reptiles to an exotic veterinarian for a wellness exam in order to assess baseline health.

Excerpts from Melissa Kaplan's "Signs of Illness and Stress in Reptiles," Edited by Evelyn Crawford, Veterinary Assistant and Reviewed by Dr. Stephanie Lamb, DVM, South Wilton Veterinary Group and Darius Starks, DVM, Lone Mountain Animal Hospital

Factors in maintaining a healthy reptile:

Enclosure of the proper size and orientation to enable thermoregulation, wide-ranging species and multiple inhabitants
Sufficient humidity
Water offered in a manner that can be utilized by the reptile
Suitable and safe substrate
Furnishings (logs, rocks, hide boxes, according to species needs).
Proper heating and thermal gradients
Proper lighting (day/night cycles, UVA/B when required)
Healthy food appropriate for the species and of appropriate size
Proper cleaning and disinfecting of enclosure, substrate, and furnishings
Regular monitoring of enclosure and equipment to ensure proper maintenance
Regular monitoring of the reptiles to detect early signs of stress or ill health
Access as needed to an experienced reptile veterinarian for initial examination of new reptiles and exams and treatment as needed as problems arise

Assessing stress and illness in reptiles means looking at the animal in its immediate environment (enclosure and equipment) as well as the macroenvironment (the room in which the enclosure resides).

Check the overall appearance of the reptiles:

Are there any wrinkles or are the folds of skin normal for the species or exaggerated in appearance?
Has there been a change in color?

Check for changes in feeding habits:

Has food intake dropped off? Eating more?
Food choices changed?
Are they selecting foods with higher moisture content?

Look for changes in the appearance, consistency and amount of feces and urates:
Are there less urates (white portion of stool)? Is it thicker, more viscous?
Are fecal masses smaller, harder, drier?
Defecating less often?

Check for any changes in behavior:

Is the reptile lethargic?
Spending more time in hiding or in the cooler end of the thermal gradient?
Spends more time in basking area?
Prolonged soaking in water bowl?
More active, especially at odd times?
Engaging in frequent or prolonged digging, scratching or head-banging behavior?
Increased or decreased tongue-flicking when handled or enclosure is opened?
Has the usually tame reptile become aggressive (not associated with breeding season)?*

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Check for changes in shedding:

Has the shed schedule become erratic?

If the reptile should be shedding in one piece (all snakes, some lizards), is it?

Are sheds taking much longer than usual to complete?

Check for physical signs of illness an injury:

Is it gaping (sitting with open mouth) for long periods of time?

Increased or thickened saliva?

Pale color to tissues inside the mouth?

Prolonged eversion of hemipenes or cloacal tissue after defecation?

Limping?

Swelling of digit, tail, limb, back, jaw?

Loss of muscle tone/strength?

Tremors?

Shakiness?

Less climbing or failure to climb?

Difficulty raising body off ground (for legged species)?

Difficult or failure to right itself?

Any lumps, bumps or bruised areas?

Any scabs?

Blisters?

Just because a reptile is alive, eating, and defecating, it doesn't necessarily mean it is healthy. Learn both normal and abnormal behaviors for your reptile species. Direct any questions about base line normal health and behavior towards your exotic veterinarian.



Lone Mountain Animal Hospital is a full service facility that has been providing pets with the finest professional health care for over 20 years. We offer comprehensive examinations and consultations, along with preventive treatments, surgical & dental procedures, radiology & ultrasound, and laser surgery. We also offer an in-house laboratory to produce the fastest results possible. At Lone Mountain Animal Hospital we see dogs and cats, as well as a long list of exotics including: reptiles, birds, potbelly pigs, rodents, and more! Please visit us online at LMAH.net or call 702-645-3116 to schedule an appointment.