

Perform a Medical Checkup

When. Do an exam at anytime but we suggest on emergence in the spring and well before winter sleep if medication or treatment is needed. For most tests or Rx, the tortoise needs to be active and the metabolism “up” to support healing.

Where. Examine at a table. Lay down plenty of newspapers and an old white towel under the tortoise. It may release bladder contents. If that happens, notice the color of the urine. It indicates degrees of dehydration. Pale yellow urine indicates well hydrated. As more and more water passes from the bladder into the blood stream (something they can do and we cannot), the urine becomes increasingly dark reddish brown. As it darkens, it thickens. Urate salts in gritty whitish clumps or soft like clotted milk are normal and may be present in the urine. Scats from the bowel may also be passed at the same time.

Heft of the tortoise. A tortoise should seem heavy for its size at any time. If you question the weight, weigh every two weeks for changes. This is a good time to weigh and measure your tortoise for your log.

Signs of injury. Look for cuts, cactus spines, lost or loose scutes on shell. Females may lose scutes on forelegs from males biting them during courting. A tortoise with an open wound must be kept indoors, away from flies that can infest the wound and cause death. Cover the wound with a loose dry gauze bandage and call your tortoise vet as soon as possible for advice and an appointment. Do not try to treat an open wound except to apply pressure to stop bleeding.

Check the soft skin for ticks where it attaches to the shell. Minute, young ticks may also be resting on the flare of the front and rear edges of the carapace (upper shell). Contact Kern CTTC to learn how to remove ticks.

Look for signs of Upper Respiratory Tract Disease (URTD).

- Nares (nostrils) blocked, runny or bubbly



- Eyes runny, inner lids quite visible, crusts or swelling of the outer lid

- Forearms with dried mucous from tortoise wiping nostrils on them

- Breath that is a moist. Wheeze may be due to disease, but a dry whistle may be just air moving by the many natural, wafer-thin structures in the nasal cavity.

- Mouth gaping. You may hear a wheeze or nothing as if tortoise is unable to clear its throat or breathe.

- Appetite consistently poor or not eating at all; may be difficult to separate this from seasonal lack of appetite.