



TORTOISE POST HIBERNATION INFORMATION SHEET

IMPORTANT: This guide aims to be an introduction to post hibernation care. If you have any concerns regarding your tortoise's health, you should always seek advice from a knowledgeable vet as soon as possible.

- **WHY HIBERNATE:** All healthy Mediterranean species of tortoise require some form of winter cooling to remain healthy in captivity. Replicating seasons for your tortoises instead of an unnatural constant temperature can encourage healthy natural behaviour. There are several different species of Mediterranean tortoise, and it really depends on their natural range to determine how long hibernation should be, or whether they should hibernate at all. Please refer to our hibernation sheet for more information.
- **KEEP RECORDS:** Keep records of weights, dates and observations during wake up time and throughout the year to help you and your vet know your pet. Understanding your own tortoise patterns will help you make informed decisions each year. Decisions will vary from year to year based on how well your tortoise has fared.
- **WHEN TO WAKE UP:** For temperature reasons UK keepers tend to hibernate during Dec, Jan and Feb as food is harder to find and winter is at its most bitter. Exact wake up date will depend on age, species and general health of your animal, again please consult the hibernation information sheet.
- **HOW TO WAKE UP:** Wake the tortoise up by slowly increasing the temperature. The evening before you want the tortoise to wake up, take your tortoise's container from its hibernation space to a heated household room. Remove any lids to allow more air movement and leave for 6-8 hours so the tortoises can gently warm to room temperature. Ensure the tortoise cannot fall or encounter other dangers during this process.
- **HEALTH CHECKS:** Once a tortoise has gently risen to room temperature make a close visual check of your animal. Your tortoise should ideally not have lost approximately more than 5% of its body weight. If you can, carefully open its mouth and check that the mouth is pink and clear. If necessary use a cotton bud to remove build up (yellow mouth rot is common and would require vet treatment). Check eyes, limbs and tail for unusual sores or swellings that may need vet attention.
- **BATHS:** Give 15-20 minute warm baths daily. Baths help the tortoise rehydrate and purge toxins which will have built up during hibernation. Once normal activity has restarted, weekly baths and checks can resume. Good hydration is essential for healthy hibernation recovery. Regular baths and water dishes must be provided. REPTOBOOST powder by vetark can be a useful aid in helping a tortoise kick start from hibernation and is easily added to water. A swift vet check is recommended for animals which appear particularly debilitated and weak. WORMING must NEVER take place straight out of hibernation. Tortoises need time to strengthen from a hibernation period and should only receive routine medication once full strength is restored to avoid unnecessary sickness.
- **CORRECT HEAT:** Please note that tortoise(s) need a basking heat source to aid swift recovery from hibernation. Ambient temperature from radiators and heat mats is insufficient. The provision of heat and light is vitally important for tortoises post hibernation. Lamp heat and light stimulate the tortoises' body functions. The basking area should be around 30°C and 19°C room temperature for Mediterranean species. Night time temperatures should be no lower than 15°C to avoid the tortoise returning to a hibernation state. PLEASE NOTE: These temperatures are just a guide and specifics will vary between species.
- **FEEDING:** A post hibernation tortoise should ideally feed within 10 days of waking. Gentle coaxing with fresh cucumber or hand feeding can help a tortoise with its first bite, which is the hardest. Hand feeding is a very successful method, please consult your local vet or club for support on the matter if required. Feeding tubes should always be a last resort for extremely sick tortoises too weak to be hand fed. Dangers of overfeeding by tube are high and often does not solve the original feeding problem.

- **FOOD SOURCES:** Finding food can be a worry this time of year. Below are a few suggestions:

1. Wild feeding: Fresh/dry weeds are the best option for a nutritious balanced diet by far, and free!
2. Home grown: Cactus, weed mix, edible flowers (Not solely clover for babies).
3. Supermarket: Lambs lettuce, watercress, rocket, mixed herb salad

Never give spinach, cabbage, kale, beetroot leaves, fruit or other veg. It is particularly important to use a vitamin supplement rich in calcium and VitD such as Nutrobal, at this time of year, as there is less natural light. Lower doses of vitamins and minerals will be present in food.

- **CAREFUL OBSERVATIONS:** Examples of problems which will require a check from a vet:

- URINE & FAECES: Ensure the tortoise resumes normal motions within approx. 2 weeks. This can be aided by daily baths until this happens.

- SMELL: A strong unusual smell from urates which could indicate the presence of bad bacteria.

- INACTIVE: A quiet tortoise that will not feed, sunken eyes and generally out of character.

- COLOURING: Pinking undershell, damage which smells or appears infected, persistent pale mouth.

- **HISTORIC CONDITIONS:** A tortoise which has a known history of health problems or treatment e.g RNS, trauma, etc.
- **SWOLLEN:** Swollen limbs, eyes, ear area.
- **NOSE:** Discharge from the nose can result from the stress of waking, so clear the nose by pressing under the palate and wipe with a clean cloth. If the liquid is clear, monitor your animal closely. Visit vet if normal feeding and behaviour fails to resume. If the nose discharge is not clear, an infection may be present and will require veterinary help.
- **EGGS:** Females will sometimes carry over eggs to spring with no pre-hibernation signs. They will sometimes deposit them on the surface post hibernation or even nest the eggs. Always give access to a nesting area post hibernation. If a female lays an egg(s), is feeding and active, you only need to monitor and ensure she remains hydrated.
- **THIN & GAUNT:** Gaunt appearance and weight loss can be dangerous as a tortoise could have lost too much weight in hibernation and be weak and debilitated. Watch these cases carefully for change and seek medical support at the earliest opportunity if the tortoise does not resume normal behaviour. A post hibernation tortoise can crash in health anything up to 2- 3 months post hibernation.
- Discuss with your vet about using vetark REPTOBOOST to help post hibernation recovery. CRITICAL CARE' can also be invaluable for sick tortoise recovery.

SUMMARY

- Record charts throughout the year and especially around hibernation.
- Quick recovery advised
- Raise temperature slowly
- Soaking daily
- Feeding within 2 weeks (hand feed if needed)
- General recovery – observe carefully and keep notes
- Access to Indoor space for your tortoise post hibernation if temperature below 15 c outside. Nesting spots for females, climbing areas, calcium block, choice of water dishes and feeding area are all advised. Access to outdoors – allow outdoors only for short periods only until temperatures rise. Please see enclosure design information sheet for more advice on this area.

East of England Vets:

- Uplands Way Veterinary Clinic, Uplands Way Diss, Norfolk IP22 4DF, T: 01379 642 865
- All Creatures Healthcare, Sandy Lane, Horsford, Norwich, Norfolk NR10 3FB T: 01603 898984
- Animates Vets, 4 Stamford Rd, Peterborough PE6 8AB T: 01778 380111

We hope you find this information guide help. Contact us using information below. Happy tortoise keeping.