Nutritional diseases in snakes

Nutritional diseases are caused by an incorrect diet. They can occur if fed too much or too little of the necessary nutrients, vitamins and minerals needed to maintain good health. Nutritional disease is commonly seen in snakes, but it is preventable.

What can a poor diet cause?

Malnutrition is the result of an incorrect diet; this may be too much or too little of any food.

It is vital your snake is kept at the correct temperature to help the stomach and small intestine absorb all the nutrients from his food. The correct temperature is dependent on species. Make sure you feed a varied diet to your snake If your snake is not eating its food it may be worth trying the next size smaller. Your snake also needs a good source of UV light to help his body absorb calcium from the intestine.

Most cases of malnutrition need specialist veterinary care.

What about vitamin and mineral deficiencies?

Snakes that eat fish can suffer from vitamin B1 deficiency; freezing raw fish damages this vitamin. Snakes with vitamin B1 deficiency show signs of muscular weakness and tremors and the loss of its righting reflex, and will also hold their head to one side. The same condition can occur if you feed unfertilized eggs to egg eating snakes.

Vitamin D3 and calcium are needed to keep your snake’s bones strong and his muscles active. Deficiencies of these vitamins are not common in snakes because they eat whole animals.
Keeping your snake at the correct temperature helps his stomach and small intestine to absorb all the nutrients from his food. Make sure you feed a varied diet to your snake; a good balanced diet, with calcium and vitamin supplements is essential to make sure the muscles work correctly. The diet available to pet snakes is of course not as varied as in the wild. So in captivity their diet is greatly simplified as we can only offer them prey that is commercially available buy in the UK. Your snake also needs a good source of UV light to help his body absorb calcium from the intestine.

If your snake has a nutritional disease he may have to visit the veterinary practice for appropriate treatment including vitamin treatments and support with feeding.

**What is anorexia?**

Anorexia means that your snake is not eating and is common in captive snakes. This can be a very serious condition, especially if the snake does not eat for a long time.

Some male snakes do not eat when they are near a female.

Weight loss of more than 10% bodyweight may harm your snake.

Keeping your snake at the correct temperature helps his stomach and small intestine to absorb all the nutrients from his food. Try to ensure you feed your snake a diet that is a close to the kind of food he would eat in the wild; many snakes will not eat unfamiliar food. You must also ensure he has access to water all the time as dehydration can lead to anorexia.

Other ways to tempt your snake to eat include trying a different sized food may it be smaller or larger, try heating the food up and tearing it to release blood.

You should weigh your snake weekly to help you spot any change in weight. If you notice your snake losing weight you should take him to see a veterinarian to make sure there are no underlying diseases.