

TURTLE CARE SHEET

The most common species of turtles kept in Australia are the Macquarie Short Neck Turtle (*Emydura macquarii*) and the Long-Necked Turtle (*Chelodina longicollis*). The following information is a guide directed towards these two species but can be applied to other turtles with similar characteristics.



Enclosure: Young turtles spend most of the start of their life in water and as they mature may spend their time shared between being in water or on land. Even though young turtles do spend most of their time submerged, it is still very important to provide them with a platform where they can rest and come out of the water if they want to. Baby turtles can become tired from continuously swimming and without a place to rest, can actually drown if exhausted. The enclosure itself should be designed to hold water with either a fitted platform or an additional platform that can be added to an existing aquarium. Water temperature for baby turtles is recommended to be kept around 22-25°C which allows the animal to continue to eat and grow, particularly through the colder months. This gives young turtles a head start in life where they may not naturally make it out in the wild if they shut down over the winter. If using tap water in the tank, make sure to use a water conditioner to remove chlorine and chloramines that can be harmful to the turtle.



UV Lighting: Ultraviolet lighting is very important for healthy shell formation, especially in growing and young turtles. UVB is responsible for assisting with the formation of Vitamin D₃ and the metabolism of Calcium and the and should be provided as part of a regular Day and Night cycle. Commercial UV tubes and compact globes emit this important wavelength of light and should be set into the lid of the aquarium. These lights should not be set over glass as glass will stop the UV passing through and therefore be ineffective in its purpose. These bulbs and tubes should also be changed every 6 months as the UVB output degrades with use and even if the light continues to emit light, the UVB output will have been diminished. You should never place the tank in the sun as this may cause the water to overheat, leading to heat stress in the turtle and a painful death.



Water Requirements: To Ensure the turtle remains happy and healthy in its aquarium, it is very important to maintain good water quality. Use a water heater to regulate the water temperature and a good quality aquarium filter to clean the water. Keeping the water pH at 7 will also assist in keeping the turtle healthy. Don't feed the turtle in the main tank as this will pollute the water and because of the types of food that turtles eat, it can affect the water quality very quickly creating an unhealthy environment. Aquarium water heaters are thermostatically regulated but it is also good practice to use an aquarium thermometer to check the heater is doing its job correctly.



Feeding: As with many animals, it is a good idea to feed a variety of different but nutritious foods to help with good health and growth. Some suggested foods include raw lean meat (meat with fat removed, offal, etc), raw fish, mealworms, pond snails, aquarium plants and commercially prepared turtle food (wet & dry). If unable to provide a vitamin rich food, it is recommended to use specifically prepared turtle supplements to fulfil their needs. Feed turtles daily when they are babies and decreasing to three times weekly at two years old.

General Health: It is highly recommended to seek vet assistance for any health issue and one common health problem can be a fungal infection. It looks like small, white spots or patches on the skin of the turtle and spreads rapidly to the internal organs. It can be fatal if left untreated. The turtle will often become lethargic and refuse to eat with this condition. The best way to avoid this situation is to prevent it by using an antifungal treatment. This can be provided in a solution form or via a slow-release block that also released calcium that can be utilised by the turtle.



Licensing: Turtles are a native protected species and may need a licence to be kept as a pet, depending on the state or Territory of Australia that you live. Check with your state or Territory National Parks and Wildlife department for further details on keeping turtles in your region.

