

Wellness Checklist for Terrestrial Chelonians

If you suspect your turtle has medical issues, please seek the advice of an exotics veterinarian with chelonian experience. Also, examine the possible role of diet, social setting, and physical environment in the development of the medical problem. **Medical problem often are rooted in improper husbandry.**

Date: _____ Turtle's Name _____

Do #1-3 before extensively handling the turtle because handling can influence these items.

	BODY PART	NORMAL (CIRCLE IF FOUND)	NOT NORMAL (CIRCLE IF FOUND)	SOME POSSIBLE CAUSES; THERE COULD BE MORE !!
1.	Breathing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Closed mouth breathing (occasional “yawning” and open-mouth threats are normal!!, but chelonians normally breath only through their nose, not their mouth!) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Labored – Audible with wheeze / click / “wind in the rafters” sound 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Respiratory infection – Foreign body obstruction to airways – Trauma
2.	Alertness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Alert, bright (expect a turtle or any other cold-blooded animal to be slow when too cold) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Sleepy” / lethargic / dull 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Many causes but not to be taken lightly; what other problems do you see in this table?
3.	Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Posture normal – Movement normal with even, strong stride 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lists to one side or walks in circle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Trauma (to CNS or in affected limb) – Middle ear infection – Vit A deficiency can cause walking in circles with head held over back
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Limps: FR, FL, HR, HL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Trauma (to CNS or to only to affected limb)
4.	Legs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Well fleshed – Skin intact (be sure to check high on legs where joins body) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Skinny, very wrinkled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Incorrect or inadequate amounts of food offered – Endoparasites – Other health problems leading to inappetance or inability to utilize ingested food
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Swollen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Kidney disease – Liver disease – Thyroid Disease or other metabolic dysfunction – Localized infection – Trauma (even fibers wrapped tightly around limb cutting off circulation)

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5.	Feet / Toes / Claws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Skin intact on top and bottom of feet - All toes present - Toe(s) missing but healed - Toes intact but claw(s) missing and healed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open sores - Freshly torn toes or claws - Swollen feet - Swollen toes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trauma - Infection (localized or systemic) - Metabolic Imbalance - Frostbite
6.	Claws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Claws proper length and shape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Claws overgrown (curling unnaturally and in need of trim – (see “Beak and Claw Care” at boxturtlefacts.org) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enclosure too small for adequate exercise - Substrate of habitat not adequately abrasive enough to wear down claws
7.	Skin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intact (become familiar with normal skin /scale colors and textures, and normal skin folds / wrinkling in your turtle – take pictures!) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dry, flaking skin - Rash (Irritated red skin) - Open sores / scabs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environment too dry or too wet - Systemic infection - Metabolic imbalance - Mal- / under- nourished
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bruises - Rash (Irritated-looking red skin) - Open sores / scabs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trauma - Systemic or localized infection - Metabolic imbalance
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Swellings/lumps/bumps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Infection - Tumor - Ectoparasite infestation (e.g. Turtle Flesh Fly)
8.	Tail and vent / cloaca (slit under tail where wastes are eliminated)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tail intact or if truncated, tip healed - Vent clean - Skin intact, smooth, normal color 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prolapse (see “When the End is in Sight” at boxturtlefacts.org . A prolapse requires immediate medical intervention! Whatever tissue dries dies!) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GI foreign body impaction/irritation - Constipation /Obstipation - Trauma - Infection - GI endoparasites - Dystocia - Certain nutritional deficiencies
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vent coated with many tiny white specs (flesh fly eggs) or tiny, wiggly flesh fly maggots (treat ASAP following instructions under “Tools” at boxturtlefacts.org) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Myiasis: parasitic flesh fly larvae (maggot)-infestation

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open, unhealed tail tip 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trauma (e.g., tip nipped off by habitat mate or predator or caught on object and cut or ripped off)
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vent dirty with mucus / loose stool (<i>collect same-day sample for vet to check for gut parasites</i> - <i>keep stool moist in air-tight baggie at room temperature</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GI tract parasites
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vent on female irritated / tissue reddish - Vent on female swollen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GI foreign body impaction - Cloacitis (inflammation of cloaca); in females sometimes associated with excessive mating; turtles only <i>infrequently</i> encounter each other in the wild; repeated daily intercourse is abnormal
9.	Head / Throat / Neck	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Skin smooth, no lumps - Symmetrical shape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lumps on one or both sides of head (see "Ear Infections in Chelonians" at boxturtlefacts.org) - Lumps on neck 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Middle ear infection (over tympanum or with track line to lower point on neck) - Tumor - Ectoparasite infestation (e.g. Turtle Flesh Fly)
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greyish/black /sloughing skin on head / snout) following hibernation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mechanical trauma - Frostbite
10.	Nares (nasal openings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear and open 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nare(s) plugged with mucus - Nare(s) crusty - Nasal discharge - Bubbling (note: a bubble or two is normal when a turtle raises its head from drinking, eating gooey food like a worm, snail, slug) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Respiratory infection
11.	Eyes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear and bright - Both eyes spontaneously open wide when not sleeping - Both eyes have same iris size 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cloudy - Discharge; describe color and thickness) _____ - Crusty - Puffy / bulging - Won't / can't open - Sunken and shut 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trauma - Eye infection - Conjunctivitis - Systemic infection - Metabolic imbalance

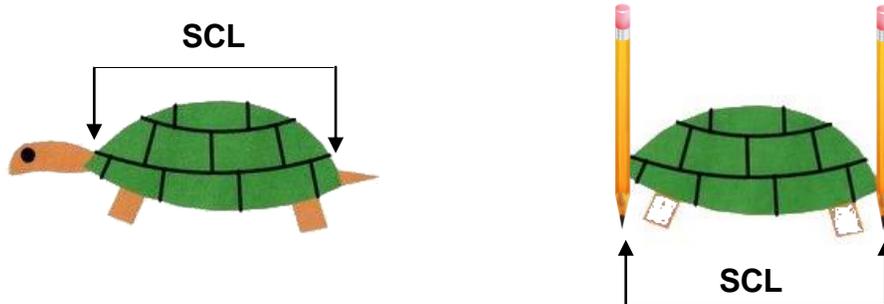
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Iris sizes are different 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Neurological damage caused by trauma or infection
12.	Beak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Normal shape and length 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Overgrown or malformed beak (see "Beak and Claw Care" at boxturtlefacts.org);) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Improper diet (e.g. not sufficiently abrasive, too little calcium, improper calcium / phosphorus ratio, excessive protein)
13.	Mouth (<i>tap lightly on nose or gently squeeze a front leg/foot to encourage turtle to open its mouth</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Clear, moist but not tacky – Odor free – Tongue pink or grey (color varies both within and between species) – Expect foamy discharge when eating snails, slugs, and some other foods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sores – Raised whitish/yellowish spots/streaks ("cottage cheese mouth" – indication of mouth infection) – Odor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Trauma – Mouth infection possibly associated with systemic disease but may be confined to the mouth
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Discharge (foam or fluid); indicate color _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Respiratory infection (<i>could be life-threatening pneumonia – see vet ASAP</i>) – Hyperthermia(overheating <i>at this stage is life-threatening; put animal in shade in shallow water at <u>room temperature</u> – never douse or place in chilled water or next to air conditioner)</i>)
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Tacky / stringy mucous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Dehydrated (many possible causes – anything from simple lack of access to water to serious systemic infection)
14.	Carapace (top shell) - <i>wet turtle with "room temperature" water to remove debris that could hide defects</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Without defects noted in next column 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Discolorations – Soft spots – Abrasions / pitting – Lifting and / or missing scutes – new this season (box turtles and tortoises do not normally shed scutes like water turtles) – Odor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Trauma and /or shell infection (see "When there are Chinks in the Armor" at matts-turtles.org/healthcare)
15.	Plastron (bottom shell)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Without defects noted in next column 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Discolorations – Soft spots – Abrasions / pitting – Missing scutes – new this season – Odor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Same as above

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16.	Weight (record below)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should feel heavy in the hand relative to size with <i>shallow</i> concavity between head and front legs, and in front of hindlegs (see Healthy Weight and Size at Tortoise Library) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Underweight: severe concavity between head and front legs, and around hindlegs Overweight: bulges around legs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MANY causes (e.g. incorrect diet, social stress, infectious illness, metabolic imbalance, gut parasites, beak overgrowth affecting eating)

Note: To limit the size of this checklist, many details regarding symptoms and causes have been omitted

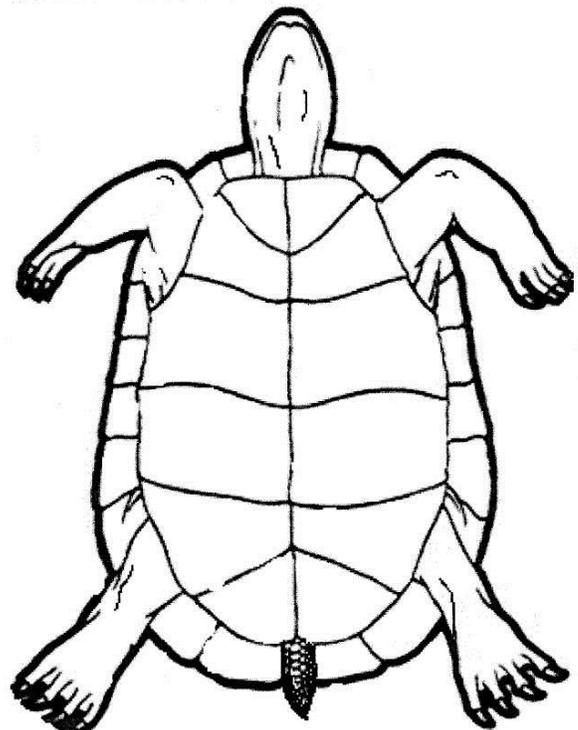
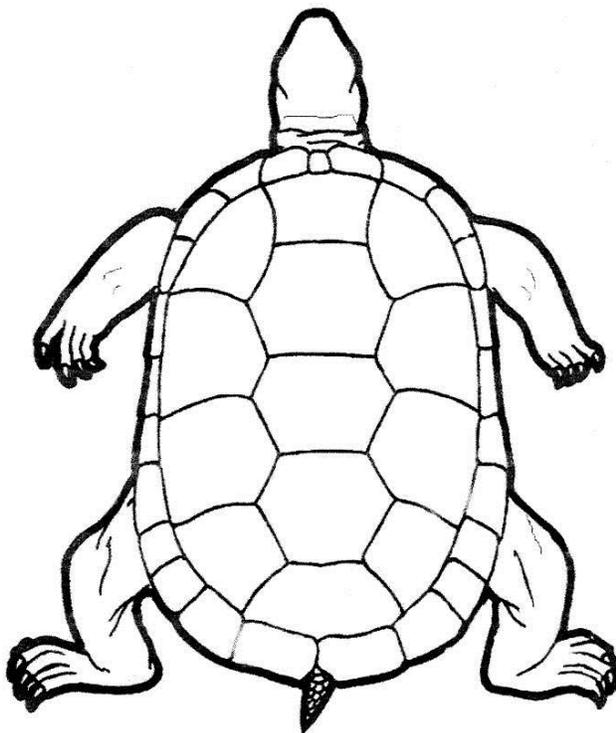
Weight (in grams; 1 oz = 28.3 g): _____ (Note: medications are dosed based on weight in grams)

Straight Carapace Length (SCL) (in millimeters; 1 in = 25.4 mm): _____



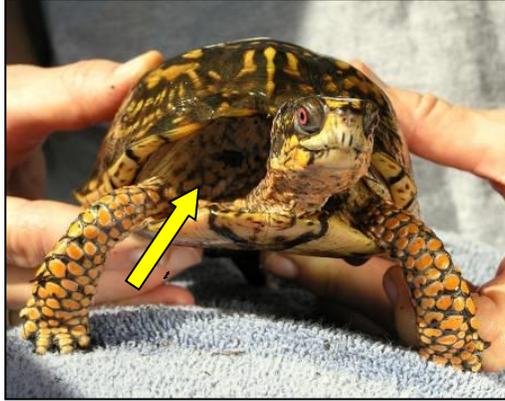
If you do not have calipers to measure your turtle's length, place your turtle on a piece of paper and using a pencil held perpendicular to the paper, mark one end of the carapace on the paper and then make another mark for the other end along the centerline (mid-dorsal line). Measure the distance between the two lines.

Sketch identifying marks and abnormalities.





Good weight



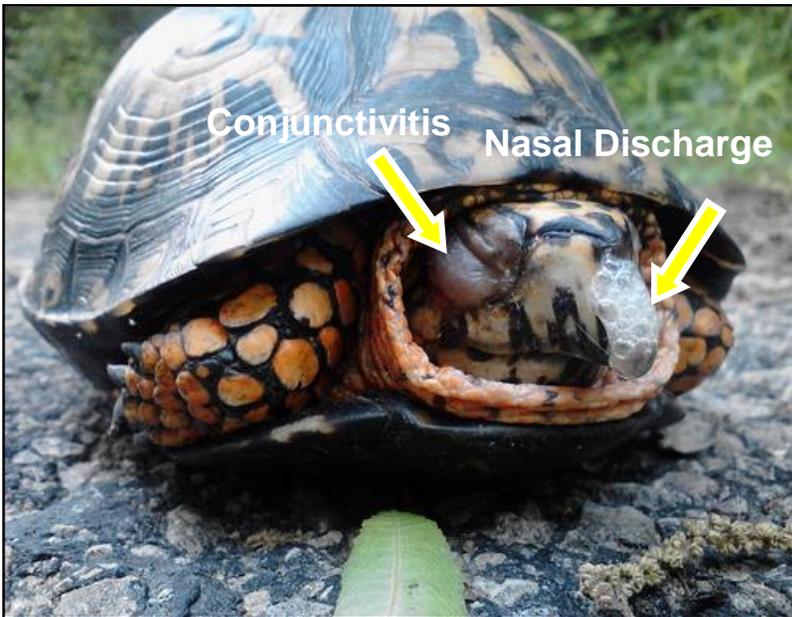
Severely underweight



Overweight



Tympanum on the left is normal; the one on the right is swollen due to an infection of the middle ear and accumulation of purulent material under the outer membrane.



Box Turtle with severe respiratory infection



Severely dehydrated Box Turtle