

Metabolic Bone Disease

Metabolic Bone Disease (Fibrous Osteodystrophy) is the most common disease of captive iguanas, and results primarily from gross malnutrition. Most new iguana owners are not given proper dietary counseling when they buy their iguana. The most common mistake is feeding Lettuce of any type. Lettuce, especially Iceberg, contain little if any necessary and vital nutrients. The problem is aggravated by vitamin D3 and calcium deficiencies, which result from inadequate exposure to direct sunlight or artificial ultraviolet light.

Signs of Metabolic Bone Disease include general listlessness, and enlarged and swollen lower jaw, difficulty in eating, and extremely swollen limbs and tail. Sometimes the back, tail or legs are fractured or deformed. Unfortunately, these desperately ill iguanas appear well fed and chubby, and veterinary care is not often sought until it is too late.

Iguanas with metabolic bone disease must be treated by a competent reptile veterinarian.

Lettuce eaters must be encouraged to accept other more nutritionally complete foods. One can wean an iguana off lettuce by offering foods similar in appearance such as spinach, beet greens, kale, mustard and collard greens. One can also chop up various vegetables and fruits into small pieces and mix them with the lettuce.

Vitamin and mineral supplementation is highly recommended in such cases and it is important to follow recommended guidelines.

A high quality artificial Ultra-Violet light must be properly attached to the iguana enclosure. This light should be on during all daylight hours.

A very good diet and proper UV lighting is essential for captive iguanas. Metabolic bone disease can be easily prevented with proper care and diet.