

How to find an exotics vet for your tortoise

A mammal vet (MV) in my area says they treat tortoises. How do I know its safe?

- Is the MV willing to admit they don't know something?
- What are the MV qualifications? Extra classes, research, many years of keeping tortoises?
- Does the MV listen to you? Only you know your tortoise and its symptoms.
- Is the MV willing to reach out to other exotic vets and help find the answer?
- Is the MV willing to work WITH you to find the answer?
- Are they willing to look at your research and discuss treatment options?

Do I really need an exotics vet? YES

- Not only do you need an exotics vet you need one experienced with tortoises
- Treating a tortoise is completely different from treating mammals or other reptiles
- Mammals have been studied and treated for 3,000 years; tortoises are barely domesticated

How do I know its an exotics vet?

- Exotics is a specialty and chances are it will be in the name or description of the practice
- Ask: What training did they receive regarding tortoises?

Red flags (true situations):

- Outdated knowledge/methods:
 - Vitamin A shots
 - Fiberglass patches for shell fractures
 - Unaware of which species are sensitive to certain antibiotics

- Doesn't understand the difference between a water turtle and a tortoise
- No idea what species it is; says it doesn't matter
- Cuts off body part because the vet didn't know what it is
- Trims a beak into a shape unknown to a tortoise
- Discounting your experience and knowledge

Your rights and responsibilities as an owner and consumer:

- Ask for references
- Ask how long they've been treating tortoises
- Ask what education they have regarding tortoises
- Ask what additional research they read

If you do not feel listened to, or treatment doesn't sound right or the vet can't adequately explain recommendations, or your gut is telling you something is wrong:

Pick up your tortoise and leave

More tortoises have been harmed by untrained vets and owners who don't think critically about, or stand up for, their tortoise. It is your responsibility as an owner to advocate for your tortoise, understand the species and seek qualified medical care when needed.

Exotic pets need exotic care

Information presented is intended as a general guide and in no way represents finality on the subject. Owners and prospective owners are encouraged to continue learning about the animals in their care.