

Nutritional Problems for Foxes

With the increased use of fish, waste meat and other products for fur animals, there is concern that nutritional problems may arise. It is important then to modify some products and use other feeds in moderation to avoid damaging the health of your animals. A number of nutritional disorders may be observed if local products are fed improperly.

Chastek Paralysis can result from feeding certain types of fresh fish. This dietary disease was first recognized in 1932 on the Chastek Fur Farm in Minnesota. During a one month period, it killed one third (1/3) of an entire ranch of over two hundred (200) foxes. This disease can also be seen in mink and cats. It occurs because the enzyme thiaminase is in some fish and this destroys vitamin B1. Foxes become weak, lose appetite and go into fits. Early cases should respond to 10 mg of injectable B1 (thiamin). Thiaminase is not related to soiled feed but is related to certain types of fish such as caplin, herring and smelt. To avoid this problem these fish, containing thiaminase, should be cooked (200° F for 15 minutes). Cod should be cleaned since problem fish may be contained in the gut.

Consumption of rancid feed can cause a **Vitamin E deficiency**. This could result in Steatitis (yellow fat disease). This can cause sudden death in mink kits and has also been described in fox. Less severe cases with staggering and hind quarter problems can be treated with intramuscular injections of Vitamin E. To avoid this problem, do not use rancid seal or any feed product that even appears rancid for furbearers diet.

Biotin is a nutrient essential for normal growth. There is a factor in raw egg whites which ties up biotin. While several weeks are required for a deficiency to develop, the end result can be stunting and lack of pigment in fur. Deficient mothers give birth to similar pups. Eggs should be cooked (200° F for 15 minutes) to destroy the enzyme causing the problem.

Other problems may develop in fox when there is an imbalance of nutrients. For example, feeding all meat diets without bone can result in a **calcium/phosphorus imbalance**. This type of problem could arise if moose meat was fed excessively. Although feeding excessive amount of seat meat (with ground bone) may not result in a calcium/ phosphorus imbalance it is certainly not advisable because of other imbalances.

All meat diets can result in a condition called rickets. Bones can become soft or deformed. In addition, reproduction and lactation can be adversely affected. The demands for calcium by a fetus and for milk production in adults need to be met and a balanced diet is necessary for this.

In summary, all furbearers should receive a balanced diet. This can be easily provided in a dry feed ration. However, if supplementing dry diets with other ingredients, it is important to follow your feed company's recommendations. Avoid nutritional problems outlined and exercise caution with untried feed stuffs.