

## Caring For Ball Pythons

Ball pythons are among the most popular of all pet snakes because they are good “beginner” snakes. They are docile and moderately easy to care for, although they require a lot of space in their habitat. Ball pythons are innately shy creatures, but with some time and effort they learn to trust their caretaker and can make exciting pets!

### Facts:

- Lifespan 20-30 years
- Weight 3-7lbs
- Adult Size: 3-5ft
- Native to Africa
- Constrictor, non-venomous
- Carnivorous
- Fearful of fast movements
- Smallest African python

### Common Problems:

- Respiratory illness
- Skin infections
- Mouth rot
- External and internal parasites
- Prey-induced trauma
- Anorexia
- Thermal burns
- Retained shedding

### Preventative Care:

- Complete physical exam every 6-12 months
- Yearly fecal exam to check for parasites
- Annual blood work to monitor organ function
- Routinely monitor for mites

## DIET ESSENTIALS

- ~The size of the prey should approximate the width of the snake at the largest part of its body.
- ~Never leave live prey unattended in your snake’s cage as it can cause severe injuries or even death to your snake.
- ~Frozen-thawed mice and rats are safer and less expensive.
- ~Try not to handle your snake for at least 24 hours after feeding.

## Ball Python Feeding Guidelines

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Recommended Feeders: Quantity, Type, and Size	Ball Python Weight:		When To Offer Food:	
	Male	Female	Breeders	Pets Only
1x Hopper Mouse (8-11 grams)	First 3-5 meals	First 3-5 meals	Every 3-4 days	Every 7 days
1x Rat Fuzzy (10-19 grams) or 1x Small Mouse (12-17 grams)	Up to 200 grams	Up to 200 grams	Every 3-4 days	Every 7 days
1x Rat Pup (20-29 grams) or 1x Adult Mouse (18-32 grams)	200 to 350 grams	200 to 350 grams	Every 5-7 days	Every 7 days
1x Weaned Rat (30-49 grams) or 1x Jumbo Mouse (33-50 grams)	350 to 500 grams	350 to 500 grams	Every 5-7 days	Every 7 days
1x Small Rat (50-89 grams) or 2-3 Mice (depending on size)	Over 500 grams	500 to 1000 grams	Every 7 days	Every 7 days
1x Medium Rat (90-179 grams) or 3-5 Mice (depending on size)	Not necessary for typical adult males	Over 1000 grams	Every 7 days	Every 7 days
Large Rat + (180+ grams)	Not necessary for typical adult males	Not necessary for typical adult females	N/A	N/A



Say NO to...

- LIVE PREY

## Red Flags

- Unusually frequent or infrequent shedding
- Vomiting
- Lethargic
- Reluctant to eat
- Abnormal feces
- Bumps or spots on skin
- Labored breathing
- Difficulty shedding
- White/cheesy substance in mouth



Fresh, clean water should be available to your python around the clock. A large shallow pan of water should also be placed in the enclosure for soaking.

Each day, change out the water in the dish for fresh water. On a weekly basis, sanitize the water dish with a mild dish detergent and rinse thoroughly before adding drinking water.

## Normal Behavior

Ball pythons are a shy species that will coil around his/her own head and into a ball when frightened. Avoid fast or menacing movements around your python as you could startle him/her. A python can bite if frightened. A ball python's bite is a superficial wound. These creatures are nocturnal and prefer to hunt their prey at night. They spend much of the day resting in their hide box. They can be finicky eaters and can occasionally go lengths of time between meals. This may be normal, but if your snake begins to lose weight, then it should be investigated by a veterinarian. As your snake gets ready to shed, their eyes will turn a milky blue/grey color over the course of a few days and their body color will start to dull.

## Habitat Maintenance

Spot clean your habitat as necessary. Remove feces and urates promptly. Thoroughly clean and disinfect the habitat at least once a month, if not more. Place your snake in a secure secondary habitat while you scrub the tank and furnishings with a 3-5% bleach solution. Rinse very thoroughly with clean water and continue to rinse until the smell of bleach is completely gone. Dry the tank and the furnishings fully and add clean substrate before returning your snake to the enclosure.

## Environment

Your reptile should be housed in a clean, well-ventilated, screen-topped tank free of sharp edges or points. A 30 gallon glass aquarium is a suitable size for most adult pythons. Don't place a young ball python in a large cage; this may stress them out. It is important to get the appropriate size cage for your individual reptile. Temperature should be 80-85°F in the coolest part of the habitat and 90-95°F in the basking area. Maintain a humidity of 50-60% through regular misting of the cage. Purchase a reliable humidity gauge in order to keep track of the humidity in the enclosure. We recommend using undercage heating pads and ceramic heat emitters rather than hot rocks, which can cause serious burns.

Supplemental lighting is not necessary for ball pythons, but if supplied should run on a 12/12 cycle, meaning the lights are on for 12 hours and then off for 12 hours. Do not leave white lights on all of the time. A nocturnal or infrared light to be used at night. Ultraviolet (UV) light is

recommended in the UVB spectrum for most reptiles, although there is no definitive research proving pythons require it.

Bedding material should be reptile carpet, newspaper, or paper towel. AVOID shavings, sand, corncob, and fiber pellets as they can irritate the respiratory tract or cause intestinal blockage. The habitat should also include branches, rocks, hollow logs, and at least one hide box.

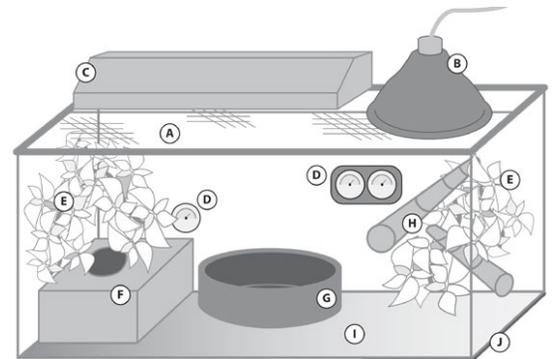
## Shedding

Ball pythons regularly shed their skin. To assist in normal shedding cycles, ensure the humidity of the habitat is correct. To facilitate a more difficult shed, you may bathe your snake in a large container that allows his/her entire body to be immersed. You could also provide a shed box or a hide box with sphagnum moss that will aid in the shedding process. NEVER attempt to remove eye caps by yourself at home, ALWAYS seek professional veterinary care.

## Signs of a Healthy Python

- Active and alert
- Clear eyes
- Eats regularly
- Healthy skin
- Regularly sheds skin in one complete piece
- Free of mites and ticks

## Habitat Checklist



- A) Fresh air screen cover
- B) Dome light with ceramic heater
- C) Fluorescent strip light on a timer
- D) Thermometer and hygrometer
- E) Artificial plants for cover
- F) Hide box
- G) Water bowl
- H) Climbing branches
- I) Terrarium carpet liner
- J) Durable, appropriately sized