

# Ball Python Care Guide

*Prepared by Dr. Lucy Haile on behalf of Wellesley Animal Hospital*

## **HOUSING**

### Substrate:

- We recommend using paper towel, newspaper or repti-carpet to line the bottom of the cage
- Avoid sand, gravel, or small particle materials as your ball python may ingest these and this can lead to constipation.



### Cages:

- A single adult ball python requires a minimum 30-gallon aquarium, larger if possible.
- Ideally the cage should be as long as the snake.
- Ball pythons are solitary animals and should be kept separately
- Snakes are good at escaping so be sure to have a mesh screen that can be secured on top of the aquarium

### Heating:

- Always ensure there is a thermal gradient in the cage i.e. there is a hot and cold side
- Temperatures:  
Hot side: 85-90F      Cold side: 75F
- Ideally have a separate thermometer in each of these areas.
- Avoid hot rocks as these can burn your ball python

### Humidity:

- Ideal humidity is 60-70% for your snake. This can be hard to establish in an enclosure and having a humid hide may be a good alternative to help with shedding and hydration. Snakes should always shed in one piece. If your snake is shedding in multiple pieces, please contact your veterinarian for advice.
- These can be bought or easily created with an appropriate size plastic container such as a yoghurt container or Tupperware box. Cut a small hole in the container just big enough for your snake to get in and out. Place sphagnum moss or paper towel in the bottom and keep this damp. Your snake will go in and out as they please.

### Hiding Area:

- Provide dark hiding areas for your snake to hide such as a wooden hut or commercially available hide
- Provide at least one hiding area in the hot side and one on the cold side.

## **DIET**

### Food

- Feed juveniles once a week and adults every 2 weeks
- An appropriate sized prey item should be no larger than the widest part of your snake
- Only feed stunned or pre-killed (frozen/thawed) prey. Live prey can cause severe injuries to your snake and is not recommended.
- Always feed whole prey items
- Snakes tend to not eat while they are shedding
- We recommend feeding your ball python in the late afternoon/evening, being a nocturnal snake they are sometimes uncomfortable being fed during the day

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## Water

- Provide water in a shallow dish at all times. Ensure this bowl is large enough for your ball python to completely fit in and to easily get in and out of.
- Soak your ball python two times a week in warm shallow water for 10-15 minutes. This increases hydration and helps with shedding. When shedding increase soaking to once a day.

## HEALTHCARE

- Your ball python will hide all signs of illness from you so we recommend a new patient exam and then yearly wellness examinations and fecal testing to help detect the first signs of sickness.
- Weighing your ball python on a monthly basis can help to detect early signs of illness. We recommend purchasing a kitchen gram scale or baby scale depending on the size of your snake and placing your snake in a plastic container on this. Try to do it at the same time of day each time.
- If you notice that your ball python's weight drops by 10% of its previous body weight contact your veterinarian immediately.
- If you notice a gradual decrease in weight contact your veterinarian to discuss causes.
- If you notice a decrease in appetite, decreased in droppings, trouble shedding or your ball python acting more lethargic please contact your veterinarian.