



# BALL PYTHON CARE



**Average Adult Length:** 3-5 feet    **Average Lifespan:** 15-30 years

## General Information

Ball pythons are a very popular and calm snake that can be found in a variety of color patterns. They are typically easy to keep though some are difficult to get on a regular feeding schedule. When you bring your new snake home it is best to already have an enclosure set up, and to let your snake settle in. Give them 5 to 7 days to get used to their new environment, and resist handling your snake during this time unless absolutely necessary. After this settling in period, try to get them to eat. If they do eat, give them at least 24 hours to digest their meal before you begin handling them. If they don't eat, leave them alone for another 7 days and try again. Healthy snakes can easily go a few weeks without eating, but if there are other issues or symptoms of a deeper problem, a vet visit may be needed.

## Enclosure

Reaching up to 5 feet in length as an adult, ball pythons need to be able to stretch out, though they aren't highly active. A 40-gallon "breeder" tank measures 36" long, 18" wide, and 16" tall and will be sufficient for most adults. Bigger is always better, as long as there is enough décor that the snake does not feel overly exposed.

## Substrate

Ball pythons need a fair amount of humidity, especially during shedding, so a substrate that can handle moisture is important. Eco-earth, Forest Floor, and Reptisoil all make good choices. Avoid things like sand and aspen shavings that are too dry or things like cedar or pine shavings that have harmful oils.

## Décor

Provide broad, strong branches, rocks, or other basking décor to allow the snake to climb closer to the heat source for basking. Also be sure to include somewhere for the snake to hide if they choose. Plastic, resin, or hollow log hides placed on both the warm and cool side of the enclosure ensure the snake will not choose safety over temperature. Ball pythons can be quite shy, having lots of places to hide will make them more comfortable. You can also add plants, artificial or live, just be sure to check that any live plants you put in are safe for your snake.

## Lighting

Ball pythons are considered crepuscular, meaning they are most active during morning and evening hours. For decades, these snakes have been successfully kept without specialty lighting like UVB, however recent studies show that UVB lighting is beneficial and providing a 5.0 UVB bulb for 10 to 12 hours a day can ensure good health and natural behavior.

## Heating

As a cold-blooded species, ball pythons enjoy and require high temperatures to keep their body temperature up and their organs functioning smoothly. During daylight hours, a white reptile heat bulb should be used on one side of the enclosure to create a temperature gradient. Daytime temperatures should range from 75°F on the cool side up to 95°F on the warm side where the snake can bask. At night, there should be little to no light and a little less heat. Nighttime temperatures should range 70-75°F. If nighttime heat is needed, heat projectors are best as they produce no light. However, if you would like some light to observe your pet at night a black or red bulb can be used for a short period of the night.

When choosing a bulb or heater, the higher the watts, the hotter it gets. Always check your temperatures with a digital or infrared thermometer when setting up a new enclosure or changing heat sources.

### **Humidity**

Ball pythons do best in an environment with 50-60% humidity. Dampened substrate, misting, and a large shallow water dish will help achieve this. If humidity gets too low your snake may have trouble shedding as well as other issues. If the humidity is too high your snake may get irritated skin or infections.

### **Diet**

Ball pythons are strictly carnivores. They need whole prey meals to ensure proper nutrition, and the most common and easy to come by is rodents, specifically rats and mice. Prey items should be approximately as big around as the thickest part of your snake, another option for selecting the right size is by weight. Weigh your snake using a kitchen scale set to grams and choose a rodent that weighs about 10% of your snake's weight. One appropriately sized rodent should be offered to young ball pythons every week, while adults can be offered one every other week.

There are a couple options when it comes to methods of feeding your snake. You can choose to feed live rodents or frozen/thawed. Each method has pros and cons, but most keepers agree that frozen/thawed is the safer and more convenient. Live feeding carries the risk of the rodent injuring the snake or, if your snake chooses not to eat that day, you are left taking care of a live animal. Frozen rodents can be kept on hand, if your snake doesn't eat one that you've thawed you can simply throw it away (don't refreeze it for later) and they just need to be thoroughly thawed and slightly warmed (NOT cooked) before feeding.

You can also choose to feed your snake in its enclosure or a separate container. Again, both methods have some pros and cons. Especially if feeding live rodents, you will want to be able to easily see what is happening, if this is not easily accomplished in the regular enclosure you may choose to feed in a separate container. Feeding in the enclosure eliminates the stress caused by moving from one container to another, which lowers the chances of your snake regurgitating their meal.

Whichever methods you choose, never leave a live rodent unsupervised with your snake, if your snake is bitten it may become fearful and hesitant to eat and rodent bites can easily become infected. After your snake eats, give them 24 hours or more to digest their meal before handling them again.

### **Keeping more than one:**

Keeping more than one ball python in the same enclosure is not recommended, there are no known benefits and several drawbacks to doing so. They can injure each other, compete for basking spots, generally stress each other out, pass diseases and parasites to each other, and even similarly sized ones have been known to try to eat each other.

**Zamzoo care sheets are intended to cover the basics of animal care, for more information we encourage you to talk to our experts and do further research!**