



FEEDING YOUR PET SNAKE

What do snakes eat?

Unlike most pets, snakes eat whole prey items including mice, rats, gerbils, and hamsters. Larger snakes will also eat whole rabbits. Since snakes eat entire prey items, this simplifies things for snake owners, and most certainly prevents many dietary-related diseases so commonly seen in other reptiles. However, it does present a problem. Namely, you must provide some type of prey to the snake. If you're squeamish about killing rodents for your snake and then watching it eat the prey, a snake is probably not the pet for you!

Ideally, your snake should be provided either a thawed, previously frozen prey item, or a freshly killed one. It is not recommended to feed live prey to snakes for several reasons. First, the prey obviously knows it is prey and unless killed and eaten immediately, it certainly suffers some psychological stress. Second, and surprising for most snake owners, is the fact that **even a small mouse can severely injure and even kill a snake if the snake isn't hungry!** For humane reasons, strongly consider feeding dead prey. The only exception would be if you know that your snake will immediately kill and eat the prey **and you will watch the snake do this.** Even with this care, there is still a slight possibility of injury to the snake. Unweaned, infant prey (pinkie mice), are safe to feed alive to smaller, younger snakes.

How often should I feed my snake?

That all depends upon the size and age of your pet. Smaller snakes usually eat twice each week, and larger snakes eat once every week to once every few weeks. Follow your veterinarian's guidelines. Your pet snake will also tell you how often he needs to eat by his response to your feeding schedule.

My snake won't eat! What's wrong?

There are many causes of anorexia, or failure to eat in pet snakes. These could be benign causes such as the stress of a new environment, shedding, pregnancy, or breeding season anorexia. Failure to eat could also be a sign of a more serious problem such as cancer, kidney failure, gout, or parasites. Your veterinarian can help determine the cause of your snake's anorexia after a thorough physical examination and appropriate laboratory testing.

Do I need to give my snake vitamins?

As a rule, no. However, since your snake "is what he eats", it's important to make sure that your snake's prey is healthy and well fed. Many owners raise their own rodents for feeding to their snakes for this reason. If you'd like, it probably wouldn't hurt to insert a multi-vitamin/mineral tablet into the stomach or abdomen of the dead prey prior to feeding your snake, but check with your veterinarian about this first.

What about water?

Fresh water in a crock that won't easily tip over should be available at all times. Snakes will not only drink from the water bowl but will often bathe in it as well (although it is perfectly acceptable to mist the snake with water a few times a week too). Make sure the water stays clean; many snakes love to eliminate in their water bowl as well as drink from it.