



## **Special Problems of Pet Snakes**

### ***General Information***

Snakes have several unique problems; understanding these problems will allow you to better care for your pet and minimize future health care problems.

### ***Anorexia***

Anorexia means lack of appetite or refusal to feed. Snakes commonly exhibit anorexia. Anorexia can be a "normal" condition, often associated with pregnancy, the breeding season, incorrect environment, incorrect diet, or most commonly the stress of a new environment. "Abnormal" anorexia is most often caused by a disease such as infectious stomatitis (mouth rot), parasites, kidney failure, or gout. Your veterinarian will need to perform a thorough physical examination and run laboratory tests in order to make sure your snake's anorexia is not caused by a specific disease. Getting the snake that suffers from "normal" anorexia to eat is a challenge but is usually successful with time and patience.

### ***Salmonella***

While turtles are most commonly incriminated in spreading *Salmonella* bacteria to their owners, any reptile, including snakes, can carry the bacterium. This bacterium can cause severe gastrointestinal disease or septicemia (blood poisoning). Many animals and people carry the bacteria without showing any clinical signs (remember Typhoid Mary?), yet shed the bacteria in their feces which can infect others.

Prevention, through proper hygiene, is the best way to control the disease. Since most snakes which carry *Salmonella* are not ill, they usually require no treatment (treatment often fails to kill the bacterium anyway).

### ***Lumps and Bumps***

Snakes are commonly seen with various lumps and bumps either on their bodies or within their bodies.

Various conditions can cause these lumps and bumps. External lumps could be caused by infections, as is the case with abscesses, tumors, or parasites. Internal swelling can be caused by various organ problems (such as kidney disease,

parasitic infections of the stomach), retained eggs in some species of snakes, tumors, and even constipation!

Your veterinarian may need to run certain tests to determine the cause of the specific swelling. Once the cause of the swelling is known, the doctor will decide if medical or surgical therapy will best solve the problem. Many lumps and bumps are benign and do not pose a life-threatening risk to your snake. Others can be signs of more serious disease. The sooner your snake is examined, the better its chances of recovery.