

## Gecko Lizard With Dystocia and Egg Problems

**My gecko has problems passing eggs or dystocia. What is wrong with her?**

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

About three weeks ago, my 10 month old female leopard gecko stopped eating any crickets, wax worms and even her shedding, and she is also gravid. I knew that she wouldn't eat much while she carried eggs, but I was growing very worried so I brought her to the vet.

Our reptile vet told us that she could have a reproductive infection, because her eggs were overdue and she wasn't eating. We had a stool tested for parasites and it came back negative, so we put Lucy on a medication for two weeks to clear up any infection she might have. During that time, we also had to force feed her turkey and vegetable baby food with calcium and multivitamin powder as well as some oral calcium to help the development of her eggs. In our second week, we used oxytocin for two days to try to get her to lay her eggs, but there were no contractions at all.

After the two weeks, Lucy hasn't gotten much better. She still hasn't laid her eggs and she won't eat any food on her own besides one cricket and her shedding, which is not enough to keep her going. We are still force feeding her and our vet recommended to get her back on the oxytocin because she said that it seems more eggs are beginning to form.

I don't know what to do. I want to ask you what you think would be a better choice for Lucy. If she does not lay her eggs, should we go into surgery to remove the eggs and her uterus, or wait and see if she eventually lays her eggs on her own?

I don't want to wait too long to a point that is too late for surgery, but I don't want to not give her a chance to lay them on her own. And if she does go into surgery, the vet said there's only a 50 percent chance of survival. I'm not concerned about the money. I just want to do what would be the best for Lucy.

Thank you for your time and please get back to me when you can.  
Thanks,  
Halie

You obviously really care about Lucy. Dystocia (inability to pass eggs normally resulting in problems) in leopard geckos is problematic, as oxytocin is usually not effective in helping a female lay her eggs. This is not just my opinion, but also information published in the reptile textbook *Essentials of Reptiles—A Guide for Practitioners*, by Thomas H. Boyer, DVM, AAHA Press, Lakewood, CO, page 113. In the book it says, "Egg-binding is also possible; the female may lay only one egg instead of two. Surgery is recommended; oxytocin does not seem helpful."

As you have already discovered, oxytocin, a hormone used to cause contractions of the oviduct, works well for many mammals with reproductive problems and is also used to help chelonians lay their eggs, but may have variable results in other species. Another hormone, arginine vasotocin (AVT, Sigma Chemical), is often more effective in causing contractions resulting in normal oviposition (egg laying) in reptiles, however it is not commercially available. Oxytocin is most effective when given early on, usually within 48 hours of dystocia. Also, oxytocin is usually given in increasing incremental doses to try to stimulate oviposition. But, I think that Lucy is beyond receiving the benefits of oxytocin at this time.

Lucy should have surgery to remove the eggs and possibly the oviduct, as well. If your veterinarian is not experienced with this type of surgery, perhaps you should ask your vet for a referral to a referral center or to another herp vet more experienced with this type of surgery. I think the odds of Lucy surviving should be higher than 50 percent, but I have not seen Lucy or evaluated her, so it is not fair for me to be judging your vet's opinion or surgical skills. If your vet is unsure, you could also suggest that he or she call the veterinary reference lab that their clinic uses and request a consultation with a vet more experienced in reptile surgery. Your vet should not be upset if you request a second opinion with another herp vet or request a referral to a larger veterinary center. I also have a paper on my website, [www.exoticpetvet.net](http://www.exoticpetvet.net), about lizard reproductive problems that you and your vet can read and download.

Surgery always has its risks, but it appears that this may be Lucy's only option at this point. She will need support care prior to surgery to ensure that she is in the best possible condition to undergo the procedure. It is most likely best to have Lucy "spayed" during the procedure to prevent future dystocia episodes and to not just have the eggs removed.



I hope that you get this information in time to help Lucy. Good luck and I will hold a good thought for her for her upcoming surgical procedure.

#### Need a Herp Vet?

If you are looking for a herp-knowledgeable veterinarian in your area, a good place to start is by checking the list of members on the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarian (ARAV) web site at [www.arav.com](http://www.arav.com). Look for DVMs who appear to maintain actual veterinary offices that you could contact.