

## Bearded Dragons Not Eating

### Why would our beardies suddenly stop eating?

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

We've had our beardies for a year. Sunny is a 1½-year-old hypo orange mix beardie that lives in my son's room; Smokey is an 11-month-old common grey beardie that lives in my studio. Each is housed in a separate cage. About 2 months ago, we figured out Smokey was female. We have no plans to breed them. I work out of the home so they see me when I'm not teaching and I'm working on my art in the home.

In January, we had a death in the family where my husband and I left for 2 weeks. My son stayed with friends and came in once a day to feed and check on the beardies. This is when they started acting a bit strange. They wouldn't eat sometimes unless he gave them extra attention. When we got back, they got down to eating only at night instead of their morning and evening routine. They never got back to eating twice a day since. I understand that once they become an adult, they don't eat as much.

Then about 2 months ago, they wouldn't eat crickets. They'd eat their greens and some super mealworms. Then when my son went to camp in July, they just stopped eating mealworms or they ate every other day. Then about 3 weeks ago, they stopped eating.

I took them to our vet, and she did a stool sample test, a blood test and an x-ray (for blockage). All came out normal.

Both lizards have been force fed and given water. Now, some days they eat, other days they won't and we force feed them. They are alert. During the day, we take them out of their cages (one at a time), and they like to walk around. Their stools are coming less. I've noticed that for the past 2 to 3 months, they prefer the cooler side of the cage.

Neither cage is near the air conditioning vent. This didn't bother them last year, even when my son went to Boy Scout camp then. We aren't doing anything different.

Any ideas? The vet wants to do a full work up. Could it be that they are just picky eaters?

I want to help you, but without the information on their husbandry (i.e., the temperature range in their habitats, the temperature in their basking spot, and their normal diet) I can't offer you much. Please have a look at the bearded dragon basic care information that I posted several weeks back, and compare that data with your own husbandry. I hope you have several combination thermometers/hygrometers in each cage, to monitor the temperature in the different areas of each cage.

I hesitate to assume that their eating patterns have changed as a result of you not being around them while you were gone. It has been going on too long for that. Make sure that you are maintaining them correctly. Their temperature should range from 85 degrees to 110 degrees Fahrenheit in their basking area. If they never sit with their mouths gaping, chances are that they are not hot enough. I am concerned that you take them out to walk around your home. Unless you live in a desertlike environment, your beardies are not being kept warm enough when they are out and about.

Please go over in specific detail with your vet exactly what you are feeding the beardies, what their temperature ranges are and what their humidity levels are. Tell her what the substrate is that you use in the cage. Let her know what your heat and light sources are, what your ultraviolet light sources are and how often you change the bulbs. She needs to know how often you mist the beardies, and how you supply them with water.

Unfortunately, many vets (with good intentions) do not know the correct environment for beardies. I speak to vets all over the country through my consultations that I perform, and often, they think that beardies should be cared for like green iguanas, which means that the temperature range and focal hot spot are way too low for beardies to thrive. I think that this may be the underlying problem with your lizards. Healthy, thriving beardies do not become picky eaters, so your vet is right to look for some sort of underlying causes. If she is in need of professional assistance, encourage her to contact the lab that she uses to set up a consult to discuss your case with an experienced reptile veterinarian. Hopefully, with all the information about husbandry, you and your vet can figure out why your beardies have stopped eating.

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**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.