

## Chameleon Lizard Lying On Side and Dark In Color

### What could be wrong with my chameleon?

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

Hi. I'm new to the reptile world and have acquired my first chameleon; she's about 9 weeks old. Last night, I found her on her side, and she was really dark colored. Today, I misted the leaves around her and she seemed to drink very well. She was eating yesterday, too. Is there anything wrong with her? Yesterday, there was a lot of activity in the room which she's not used to; maybe that caused her to lay on her side? My set up is a 55-gallon tank with a light at one end, and she seems to stay away from the light. Today she seems to be sleeping a lot but her color seems normal. I've contacted my local pet store but they didn't have much to say. I don't want her to die on me. PLEASE let me know if you have any advice. Thank you.

-Kristy V

Dear Kristy,

Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy! Chameleons are definitely NOT for beginning herpers! That said, I will try to help you with your lizard. Chameleons are quite delicate and not recommended for folks new to reptile keeping. Even experienced herpers often have problems settling new or young chameleons into a new environment. You don't say if you have thermometers/hygrometers in your tank in order to monitor the temperature and humidity in the different areas of the enclosure. You also didn't say what kind of chameleon you own and what you are routinely feeding her. All of that information is very important when trying to figure out if a lizard (or other type of herp, for that matter) is being cared for correctly. Juvenile chameleons need to be fed several times per day, and I don't know if you are caring properly for this youngster. It sounds as if you have adequate foliage to provide visual barriers and places for her to hide, but again, without specific information, I cannot be sure.

It's uncertain to me if all of the activity in the room where she is kept caused the problem, but it surely didn't help. If she has adequate places to hide and get away from the activity, the stress should have been minimal. From the color change you described and the fact that she was lying on her side, I am very concerned about her stress level and health. While hognose snakes are likely to roll over and play dead when frightened, this behavior doesn't usually occur in chameleons. I have owned several juvenile chameleons and I have never seen this behavior. So, I am very concerned that there is something very wrong with her, even though her color returned to normal the following day and she was drinking water.

I think that it is important that you find a good herp vet in your area who can advise you on your new pet. The problem with chameleons in general, and with babies, in particular, the trip to the vet and the physical examination are very stressful to these sensitive creatures. Taking samples and drawing blood are also very stressful and often difficult to perform in baby chameleons. However, with what you described, I would strongly suggest that you find a herp vet who can help you and your new friend.

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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.