

Lizard With Swollen Toe

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By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

I have a bearded dragon with a swollen toe. He is still very active and eating normally; the toe has no visible cuts, and the nail looks normal. He lives in a glass terrarium and is not exposed to any screen that he could possibly get his nails stuck in. Do you have any advice as to why this may have occurred? I am worried that he may have an infection.

The most common cause of a swollen toe is from a piece of skin that has been retained when your beardie last shed. As your lizard grows, the skin constricts the blood flow to the digit, which results in swelling. While this problem is more common in lizards that require higher humidity, it can happen to any lizard. Did your beardie recently undergo ecdysis?

Other causes of a swollen digit are infection, abscess formation, fracture or dislocation, parasitic problems, arthritis, other trauma, string or hair wrapped around the toe, metabolic problems, vascular abnormalities, gout or pseudogout. The only way that you will be able to know for sure is to make an appointment with your herp veterinarian to have your beardie examined.

In the meantime, warm soaks of the foot with the swollen toe are in order. You can gently massage the toes and foot to see if a tag of skin comes off. Be gentle so you don't injure the already swollen toe. You can also massage the foot with a bit of aloe juice from an aloe plant or with a little hand lotion with lanolin (no dyes, perfumes or other additives) to try to soften up any dead skin that is adhering to the toe. If the beardie struggles or acts like it is painful, it's best to not do these things, other than the warm water soaks, and wait for a professional opinion from your vet.

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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. Look for DVMs who appear to maintain actual veterinary offices that you could contact.