

Reptile Vomiting and Regurgitating

I have noticed one of my female lizards coughing and regurgitating her food, roughly five to 10 minutes after feeding. What could be the problem?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

I live in the UK and have a small breeding colony of leopard geckos (four females). Recently, I have noticed one of the females coughing and regurgitating her food, usually roughly five to 10 minutes after feeding. She doesn't do it every time, but quite often. Do you have any ideas what this could be?

I am going to assume that you are maintaining them correctly (25 to 30 degrees Celsius or 77 to 86 degrees Fahrenheit, with 20 to 30 percent relative humidity) and that you are feeding them an appropriate diet.

I hope that you have a herp vet whom you can work with on this case. You should have your regurgitating female evaluated and tested as soon as possible. This could be a problem with an obstruction from a foreign body (such as from the ingestion of cage substrate), a tumor, internal parasites or bacterial gastritis.

My gut feeling is that your gecko might be suffering from a protozoal infection from *Cryptosporidium*. I have discussed this problem in geckos in one of my archived columns, so please have a look. To aid your veterinarian in the diagnosis, make sure that you bring in a fresh or refrigerated sample of the material that she had regurgitated for possible testing. If possible, ask your herp vet for a few glass microscope slides in order that you can place some of the regurgitated material right onto the slides, for ease of potential testing.

Also, it is probably a good idea to bring in a fresh fecal specimen for potential testing. If you are able to get a fresh sample, refrigerate it until you can get to the vet's office.

Special stains and tests can be performed to try to diagnose cryptosporidiosis or rule it out as a potential problem. If this turns out to be crypto, then treatment is problematic. It is very difficult, if not downright impossible, to effect a cure in most cases. It might be possible to reduce the regurgitation, if it is caused by crypto. With treatment with the medication paromomycin, it is possible to lower crypto counts in some herps, so it might be worth a try. Other causes might be easier to treat and cure. If a tumor is present, surgery (difficult, at best, due to leopard gecko's small size) could be attempted.

I hope that you have already separated your female from the others; however, if the gecko does have something contagious, it might be too late, and the others have been exposed already. But, it would decrease its stress if it need not compete for food. Try and encourage your gecko to drink water or a sport's drink (for electrolytes and carbohydrates, especially) until you can get it in to see a 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.