

## Reptile Lifeless and Gasping

**My reptile is unable to keep his head up and move his front legs. He drank some water out of a syringe but is too weak to move. I don't understand how this could have happened to him over night.**

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

I have a frilled dragon that is about 2 years old. He has always been very active with a good appetite. Yesterday, I went to feed him, and he refused to eat. He acted normal, playing in the cage throughout the night. This morning I woke up, and he had his mouth open and was completely lifeless. He is unable to keep his head up and move his front legs. He drank some water out of a syringe but is too weak to move. I don't understand what could have happened to him over night. If you have any advice that would give me insight on how to help him, I would appreciate it. Our vet is more than two hours away, and I am worried that the stress of the drive would kill him. His cage temp is about 95 to 100 degrees Fahrenheit in the basking area and 80 to 88 degrees Fahrenheit in other areas. He has all UV bulbs and gets calcium and supplements regularly. I am also worried that my other lizards will become sick because they live in a very large cage together. The cage is 5 by 4 by 3 feet. Please help!

You need to take your lizard to a qualified herp veterinarian as soon as possible. I understand your concern about the stress of the trip being detrimental to his health, but if you keep him warm and in a dark carrier for transport, that shouldn't stress him out.

Although it sounds like he has some sort of acute hypocalcemia, resulting in flaccid muscles, any serious disease could cause the signs you are seeing. The open-mouth breathing could mean that he has some sort of respiratory problem, which could be bacterial, fungal or parasitic. Rarely, herps could get a foreign body lodged in the windpipe, but I don't think this is what happened here.

Are you sure you have changed the bulbs supplying the ultraviolet light as recommended by the bulb manufacturer? Older bulbs lose much of the UVB spectrum, which can result in calcium uptake problems.

Your husbandry sounds correct, but you didn't say what other kinds of lizards are living with him. Sometimes, there can be a problem when mixing species. This can result in lizards swapping parasites or other organisms. Also, because many lizards are territorial, having several in one cage – albeit a large one such as yours – can also result in chronic stress. Stress can undermine herps' immune system, and over time, this breakdown can result in illness. Therefore, I really can't say what might be going on.

Please make an appointment with your herp vet, and get your lizard evaluated immediately. Frilled dragons are usually very hardy lizards when properly cared for, so I am worried about his acute symptoms. I really like frilleds, and I have had one for three years now. I hope it is not too late for you to have your lizard examined, tested and treated.

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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.