

Corn Snake Regurgitating Food

My corn snake has regurgitated the last three pinkies it ate. What should I do?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

Q. We have a hatchling corn snake, approximately 12 to 14 weeks old. It is normal in color. Up until now it has been a good feeder. It is still feeding well but has regurgitated the last three pinkies. The ambient air temperature is 80 degrees at one end, which has a heat mat (and a daylight bulb during the day). The other end air is 65 degrees. The corn snake normally feeds early in the evening after the light is out. The last pinkie was regurgitated 48 hours after the snake fed. Other than this, it seems healthy, although rather shy. Please could you advise us as soon as possible?

A. The temperature range for corn snakes should be approximately 77 to 86 degrees Fahrenheit. I would think that with the daytime bulb that your focal hot spot should reach into the mid-80s, so I think your temperature range is good.

I have several questions for you that might help sort this out:

1. Are you acquiring your pinkies from the same or different source as before the regurgitation began occurring?

There is a chance that the pinkies might be carrying an organism that could be causing the regurgitation, if you are now getting them from a different source.

2. Are you handling your snake regularly?

You stated that it is rather shy. Handling it several days after feeding could make it regurgitate, especially if it is not comfortable interacting with you. It is always best to not handle any snake for at least three days after feeding, or maybe even a few days longer in your case.

3. Do you see a bulge in the area of the stomach (about a third the way down the snake's body)?

There is a parasite called *Cryptosporidium* that can cause chronic regurgitation. Often, the organism colonizes the stomach and causes a thickening of the stomach, resulting in the bulge seen on the snake's body. The next time it regurgitates, carefully wrap the pinkie in plastic wrap (mucus and goo especially) and make an appointment to have your snake examined and tested by a herp veterinarian. If it will be days before the snake can be seen, tell the staff that you have a regurgitated specimen for testing, and if they can't see you sooner, perhaps you can bring in the pinkie for testing. An acid-fast stain of the mucus may show the causative organisms. Fluid from gastric lavage may also be stained for the organism. However, a negative test result doesn't rule out the disease.

But it is important that you make an appointment for the little guy so that it has a chance for diagnosis and treatment. There is no cure for crypto at this time, however for a single pet snake, it might be worth attempting treatment. It is contagious to other snakes, so if you have others, use extreme caution to not spread any potential infection to others in your collection.

Please make an appointment with a herp vet and get your little snake evaluated. I hope this helps!

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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.