

Snake Blister Disease

My carpet python might have a type of blister disease. How can I treat it?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

My carpet python might have a type of blister disease. Symptoms are scales sort of fused together, and they turn white. Otherwise, he is healthy and eats plenty. How can I treat this?

Boas and pythons commonly develop blister disease, or vesicular dermatitis, if they are kept in too high humidity for their species, or if the cage substrate remains too damp.

In most cases, the initial vesicles are fluid-filled and do not contain any bacteria. However, in time, if the conditions are not corrected, any bacterial organisms found in or on the snake or its environment may contaminate the vesicles. Eventually, if left untreated, the bacteria can spread through the bloodstream, causing septicemia. In large herps, this process may take weeks or months, but with small lizards or snakes, death can occur in a matter of days. Mites can also spread bacteria to the vesicles

Sometimes, the bacteria may form abscesses at the site of the blisters, and with the next shed, ulcers will occur once the purulent abscess material is gone.

You should immediately place your snake in a dry environment, with dry substrate and good ventilation, and correct ambient temperature and humidity. Because appropriate antibiotic therapy is critical to correct treatment, you will need to bring your snake in to see a herp veterinarian ASAP for diagnosis, which may include a bacterial culture and sensitivity, biopsy or cytology, in order to choose the correct antibiotic for administration.

Because he is still eating and is active, you have a good chance of successful recovery. Please don't try to medicate your snake without the expertise of a qualified herp vet, as over-the-counter medications may not work and can cause a potentially life-threatening delay in seeking professional help.

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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.