

Aggressive Snake Strikes After Feeding

After my snake eats he strikes at any moving thing. Why is he so aggressive after feeding?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

I've heard of snakes being angry when they're hungry but not after eating. Is that normal? Why do you think he is doing that? What can I do to help him?

I have a one-year-old ball python. This is my first snake. We've been together for a little less than a year. He has a great appetite and is not aggressive when hungry. It's after he eats that is the problem. Right after he is fed (two adult mice), he strikes at any moving thing.

You can be yards away, and he'll still be striking. There's nothing in his cage or by the glass, but he's still aggressive. At first I thought it might be the fact that he doesn't want to be handled. He seems to get more aggressive the older he gets. Could he just be cocky?

Interesting problem. It would help me to know the size and weight of your snake, as well as how often you are feeding it, because I have a sneaking suspicion that perhaps it is time to bump up your snake's feeding to either a small rat or to three mice or alternately, you could try to feed at shorter intervals. I suspect that it is still hungry.

Another theory I have is that perhaps your ball python just gets itself whipped up into a feeding frenzy that takes longer than that of most snakes to subside. When a snake is hunting to feed, this causes a release of certain hormones that cause it to become excited. It seems to me that your snake seems to really enjoy the "hunt" and "kill" of its mice and that keeps it fired up after consuming its prey. It takes a while for the rodents to be digested, so even though your snake has a belly full of rodents, it may still feel hungry for a spell after it eats.

Of course, it should go without saying that you should not handle it for three days after it eats, anyway, as that is the prime way to get them to regurgitate a meal. The three day cool down would also allow your snake to settle down to digest its rodents. You didn't specify how often you are offering food, but you might want to think about feeding him more frequently (instead of feeding a larger meal each time). If you feed your snake once a week, perhaps try offering his mice every five or six days instead. Of course, this aggressive striking behavior could just be a peculiar and unique behavior of your snake. We may never really know why it does it. If you increase its feedings and your snake still is acting aggressive after a meal, then I think you must just accept it for what it is and try to avoid the triggers (movement) that causes the snake to strike. Perhaps you can move the habitat to an area with little traffic from family members, in order to minimize movement and motion that incite it to strike at the glass after feeding.

I hope this helps you out with your python.

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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.