

Snake Not Shedding Completely

Why is my snake not shedding completely and how do I help the snake to shed fully.

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

My ball python snake has not shed completely, and isn't eating like normal; also there is some loose skin on the snake's neck close to the head. I am new to owning a snake so I can use any information you can give me.

It would really help me if you, my readers, would PLEASE provide me with as much husbandry information as possible. At minimum, I really need to know the temperature range in your herp's habitat, what the normal diet consists of and any other pertinent information. If you don't know the temperature range in your herp's habitat, then you need to go out immediately and purchase at least two thermometer/hygrometers so that you can do so. Guessing won't cut it!

That being said, here is what I can tell you from the limited information you have provided. Dysecdysis, otherwise known as abnormal or incomplete shedding, is usually a sign of an underlying problem. This could be as simple as the snake not having an appropriate rough object to rub against to begin the normal shedding process, or it can be a sign of an illness.

Your snake's loose skin could be a sign of weight loss from not eating, or it could also just be occurring as a result of an incomplete shed. The anorexia (not eating) can be a normal occurrence in ball pythons in the winter, or it could be a sign of systemic disease.

I would strongly recommend that you take your ball python in to see a qualified herp veterinarian in your area for evaluation. It might be nothing, but wouldn't you feel better knowing for certain that your snake is just not eating because that is what some ball pythons do in the winter months, and not because it is ill? And if it turns out that your snake is sick, then you will be able to treat it before it becomes critically ill with a life-threatening disease.

Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP has been an avian/exotic/herp animal veterinarian since 1981. She is a regular contributor to REPTILES magazine.

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.