

Ball Python Care Guide

Second Chance Reptile Rescue | www.secondchancereptiles.com

Ball Pythons are often called "pet rocks," but a happy ball python is actually a curious, gentle explorer. They are fantastic pets, but they are notorious for being picky eaters if their husbandry - specifically security and humidity - isn't perfect. Adopting an adult often means skipping the fickle baby stage!



Quick Stats

- **Lifespan:** 20–30+ years (A long-term commitment!)
- **Personality:** Shy, Docile, & Nocturnal
- **Difficulty:** Moderate (Easy to handle, but humidity/feeding require precision)

The Rescue "Settling In" Period (The 3-3-3 Rule)

Snakes stress easily. A stressed snake will not eat.

- **3 Days to Decompress:** DO NOT HANDLE. Let them hide. Keep the enclosure covered if it's glass.
- **3 Weeks to Learn Routine:** Start establishing a feeding routine. Attempt handling only *after* they have eaten successfully for you at least twice.
- **3 Months to Feel at Home:** They will begin to explore at night and tolerate handling well.

Housing: Security is Key

A Ball Python's favorite thing is a tight, dark space. Open space terrifies them.

- **Enclosure Size:**

- **Juveniles:** 20-gallon long or equivalent tub.
- **Adults:** 4' x 2' x 2' PVC enclosure is the gold standard, however females can grow larger and may require a 5' x 2' x 2'

Important Housing Notes:

- **PVC vs. Glass:** We strongly recommend PVC enclosures over glass aquariums. Glass tanks with screen tops let humidity escape, making it nearly impossible to keep a Ball Python healthy without major DIY modifications (foil tape, etc.).
- **Hides:** You need two identical hides (one on the warm side, one on the cool side).
 - **Rescue Tip:** Half-logs are too open. Use fully enclosed black plastic box hides so the snake feels safe.

Humidity: The "New Standard"

For years, 60% humidity was considered the standard. However, reptile care is always evolving (just like how we moved from 40-gallon tanks to 4x2x2s!).

- **Target Humidity:** 70% – 80%+.
- **Rescue Note:** You may hear breeders or older guides say 60% is fine. In our experience as a rescue, aiming for 60% often means dipping below it, leading to the chronic stuck shed and dehydration we see in surrenders. In the wild, Ball Pythons spend their time in termite mounds and burrows where humidity is extremely high, even if the air outside is dry. We aim for 70%+ to replicate that safe, humid burrow.
- **How to Maintain It:** Pour water directly into the corners of the substrate. This saturates the bottom layer while keeping the top layer dry.
- **Measuring Tools:** You cannot guess humidity! Every enclosure **MUST** have a digital hygrometer (humidity gauge).
 - **Rescue Warning:** Please do not use the cheap "stick-on" dial gauges sold in kits. They are notoriously inaccurate, and if they fall off, the strong adhesive backing can stick to your snake's scales and cause severe injury.
- **⚠ The Danger Zone (Cold vs. Warm Moist):**
 - **Warm & Moist:** Safe (Tropical conditions).
 - **Cold & Wet:** DANGEROUS. If the cool side of your tank is soggy or wet (swampy), your snake risks Respiratory Infection (RI) or Scale Rot. The surface should be dry, but the air must be humid.

Heating & Safety

Ball Pythons need a thermal gradient (a hot side and a cool side) to regulate their digestion and immune system.

The Golden Rule: EVERY heat source must be connected to a THERMOSTAT. Without a thermostat, heat sources can spike to over 120°F, causing severe burns, neurological damage, or fire.

Daytime Temperatures (All Ages):

- Hot Spot: 88°F – 92°F.
- Ambient/Cool Side: 75°F – 80°F.

Nighttime Temperatures: Two Options

- **Option A:** Steady Temps (Recommended for Babies & Rescues):
 - For hatchlings, juveniles, or any snake recovering from illness/weight loss, we recommend keeping temperatures consistent 24/7.
 - Why? Small snakes lose body heat quickly. Constant warmth ensures they can digest food and maintain a strong immune system through the night.
 - How: Use a Ceramic Heat Emitter (CHE) or Deep Heat Projector (DHP). These produce heat without light, so they won't disturb the snake's sleep cycle.
- **Option B:** Night Drop (Safe for Healthy Adults):
 - For healthy, established adults, you can allow a natural temperature drop at night to mimic the wild.
 - Limit: Temperatures can drop to 72°F – 75°F, but NEVER below 70°F.
 - Warning: If your home gets colder than 70°F at night, you must use a supplemental CHE on a thermostat to keep the ambient temp safe.

Ways to Heat Your Enclosure:

Option A: Overhead Heating (Preferred) We recommend overhead heat because it warms the air (ambient temp) and the ground, mimicking the sun.

- Hardware: Deep Heat Projector (DHP) or Ceramic Heat Emitter (CHE).
- Benefits: Penetrates muscle tissue better and maintains ambient air temperatures.

Option B: Under Tank Heating (Heat Mats) Heat mats are a common traditional method, but they come with specific limitations and risks.

- **Limitations:** Heat mats *only* heat the surface they touch. They do not warm the air. If your room is cold (<70°F), a heat mat alone will not keep your snake warm enough.

- **Safety Warnings:**

1. Thermostat Required: You *cannot* plug a heat mat directly into the wall. It will overheat.
2. Probe Placement: The thermostat probe must be placed *between* the mat and the outside bottom of the tank (or hot glued to the floor inside) to read the source temp correctly.
3. Airflow: If using a glass tank, it must be slightly elevated (on little rubber feet) so the heat doesn't get trapped and crack the glass.

Safety Note: Mounting Lights Inside?

If you have a PVC enclosure and mount your heating element inside the cage, you must follow these rules to prevent tragedy:

- **The "Cage" Rule:** You **MUST** install a metal mesh heat guard (safety cage) over the bulb/socket.
 - Why? Ball Pythons are climbers. Without a guard, they will try to wrap their bodies around the warm bulb, causing horrific thermal burns.
- **Secure the Cords:** Use cable clips or channels to secure power cords flat against the ceiling/wall. A hanging cord is a strangulation risk and can be pulled down by a heavy snake.



Diet: Feeding Schedule

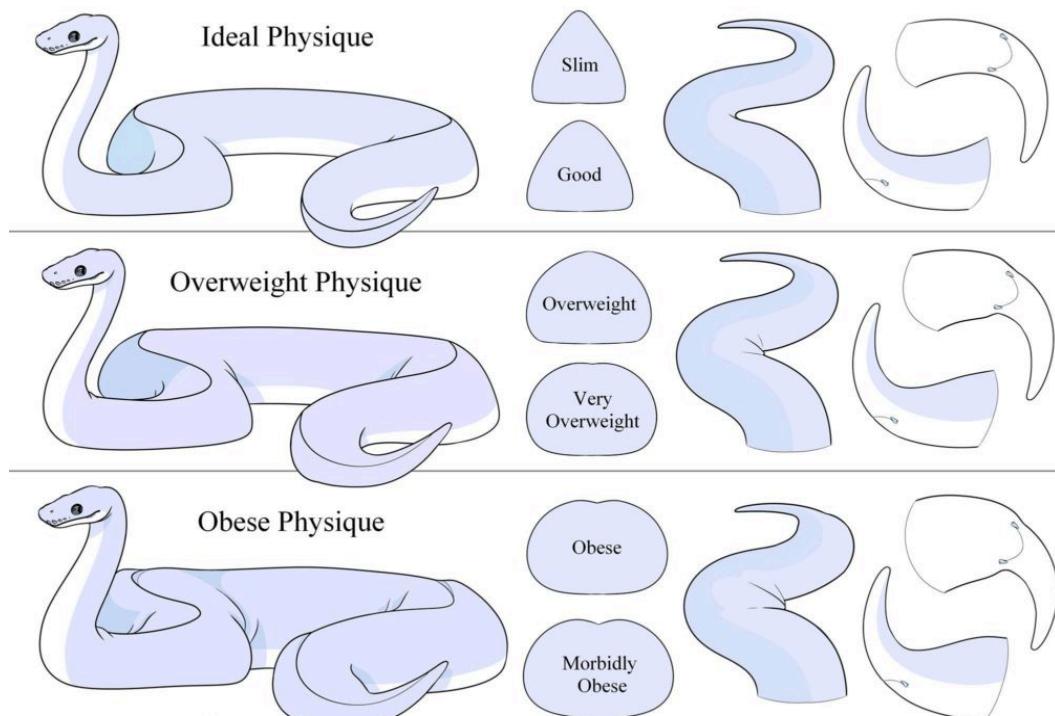
We feed **Frozen/Thawed (F/T)** rodents. This chart prioritizes slow, healthy growth over power-feeding. **How do I feed F/T?** Thaw the rat in cold water, then warm it in hot water (not boiling!) right before feeding.

Snake Weight	Feeder Weight	Frequency
< 200g (Hatchling)	13g – 19g (Fuzzy Rat)	Every 7 Days
200g – 350g	20g – 35g (Pup Rat)	Every 7–14 Days
350g – 500g	35g – 50g (Weaned Rat)	Every 10–14 Days
500g – 1500g	50g – 150g (Small/Med Rat)	Every 14–21 Days
> 1500g (Large Adult)	~150g (Medium Rat)	Every 28–56 Days

Important Feeding Notes:

- **Rats vs. Mice:** We strongly recommend switching to Rats immediately. Rats provide a better nutritional balance (higher protein, lower fat) than mice. Feeding multiple fatty mice to an adult snake can lead to obesity and fatty liver disease.

Signs and Symptoms of Obesity in *Python Regius*



🚩 When to Call a Vet (Red Flags)

- **Open-Mouth Breathing / Drooling / Clicking Sounds:** Signs of a Respiratory Infection (RI).
- **Mites:** Tiny black moving specks on the snake or water bowl.
- **"Pink" Belly:** If the belly looks pink/raw (and they aren't going into shed), it could be a scale burn or scale rot from wet bedding.
- **Stuck Shed:** If shed comes off in pieces rather than one sock, your humidity is too low.