

The Basic Ball Python Care Guide

Most recent update: January 28th 2024

Python Regius - Royal pythons, also known as ball pythons, are one of the most popular snakes in the pet trade. Looking at the wide variety of morphs, docile temperament, and a nice mid-range size averaging between 3' and 5', it's easy to see why they are so appealing to many first-time snake owners. Unfortunately, these snakes aren't always easy for beginners; they can be easily stressed, sensitive to inadequate husbandry, and often have feeding quirks that can be stressful and challenging even for experienced owners. With a healthy lifespan of 30-40 years, possibly longer, this snake is a big long-term commitment. If you are considering a ball python as your new reptilian pet, you can set up yourself (and your snake) for success by familiarizing yourself with their needs and quirks. In this guide, I will outline the basics of routine care. Links will be included for other articles that expand on certain topics.

Table of Contents

[Preparing for Your Ball Python](#)

[Enclosure Type & Size](#)

[Hides](#)

[Temperatures, Heat, & Light](#)

[Humidity & Water](#)

[Substrate](#)

[Feeding](#)

Preparing for Your Ball Python

I just want to start by taking a moment to stress the importance of preparation. Many of the common struggles people experience with basic husbandry can all be avoided by taking the time to set up your full enclosure before bringing home your ball python. Issues with heat, humidity, substrate, equipment, decor, etc., are all much easier to troubleshoot and fix without a snake involved. Buy all of your supplies, set up the enclosure completely, and run everything as if the snake is already living in there. Take a week or two to ensure your temperatures and humidity are appropriate and stable. Use this time to make adjustments and buy more supplies as needed. When everything is running smoothly, then it's time to go get your ball python!

[Click here for The Shopping List - recommended supplies for ball pythons.](#)

Enclosure Type & Size

The enclosure is the foundation for every other aspect of ball python husbandry. When it comes to choosing an appropriate enclosure for a ball python, opinions vary quite a bit. Do you go with a glass tank, a PVC reptile cage, a wood vivarium, a modified storage tub, or something DIY? Do you choose something snug or spacious? What if you buy a baby snake, do you get a small enclosure now and upgrade to a bigger one later?

The best place to start is choosing the type of enclosure you want. Different materials and designs have different advantages and disadvantages.

Most first time snake owners go straight for the glass tanks; available in every pet store, easy to find cheap on sale or second-hand, and it makes for a nice display. However, these enclosures are often not appropriate for ball pythons. There is a lot of ventilation with the screen lids/tops used with aquarium type tanks or something like the Exo Terra terrariums. A high amount of ventilation means humidity can easily escape. These tanks can also be challenging in regards to maintaining the right temperature gradient. A lot of your heat is likely to escape through the screen, as well as the tank walls if they are not insulated in some way. If your home (not your climate - remember, the inside of your home is not necessarily the same as outdoors) tends to be significantly cooler and/or drier than your ball python needs, a screen-topped glass tank can require a lot of modification, monitoring, and maintenance. We'll talk more about that throughout this guide.

Plastic enclosures, whether they are PVC reptile cages or storage tubs, are much more suitable for a royal python's needs. This is kind of a "set it and forget it" type of enclosure. Plastic enclosures generally insulate heat much better than screen-topped tanks, and the minimal ventilation allows for easy humidity retention.

Storage tubs might not be nice to look at, but they're cheap and easy to find in a variety of stores. Tubs require some modification, like drilling air holes, but setting up a tub is a simple task using a few basic tools. The down side: it's difficult, if not impossible, to find tubs big enough to be a comfortable permanent home for an adult ball python. Tubs are most useful for quarantine or emergency housing, or raising a juvenile who will later be upgraded to a larger enclosure.

PVC reptile cages may seem expensive, but they are an excellent investment in the long-term care of your pet. Prices will vary depending on the manufacturer, dimensions, and whether or not you have to assemble the cage yourself. These cages have similar visibility and aesthetic benefits of a glass tank, and all of the practical husbandry benefits of a tub. Many people buying a baby ball python will start with a mid-size tub, then upgrade to a PVC cage when the snake outgrows the tub, though there's nothing wrong with putting a baby straight into an adult-sized enclosure.

Once you have decided what type of enclosure to use, you must then decide what dimensions that enclosure should be. A good rule of thumb for the minimum enclosure footprint is that the length of the enclosure is equal to or greater than the length of the snake, with 24 inches or more depth to accommodate hides and other decor. For example, if you have an enclosure that is 30 inches long, this would be technically suitable for a snake up to 30 inches long. Remember, though, this is just the minimum guideline. Bigger is *always* better, especially when you're setting up a permanent home for an adult snake. You may also find it difficult to fit appropriately sized hides and water dishes in smaller enclosures, particularly those with shorter widths. Choosing an enclosure larger than the recommended minimum is great for accommodating the basic

necessities while also leaving plenty of room for other enriching decor, as well as giving you the option to have a little bit of clear floor space which can come in handy.

Also think about the overall shape of the enclosure's footprint. Square enclosures can be more difficult in regards to creating a temperature gradient. Rectangular enclosures will be easier to work with in creating appropriate warm and cool zones, especially if you are using ambient heat sources.

Myth: "Large enclosures will cause stress!"

Truth: Big open spaces will make a snake feel exposed and vulnerable, especially with juveniles.

However, the size of the enclosure is not the cause of this problem.

Empty space should be cluttered with hides and other decor to provide a sense of security for your snake.

If you have a small juvenile but you don't want to buy multiple enclosures over the course of your snake's growth, don't be afraid to start with the adult sized enclosure. Plan for at least a 4' long adult if you choose this route; even if your ball python doesn't end up being that large, you will be glad to have the extra space. A footprint of 4' long and 2' wide will comfortably accommodate the average adult ball python. If you have an individual much larger than 4', a 5' or even 6' long enclosure would be more suitable. When housing a young or small snake in a larger enclosure, be sure to clutter up all that empty space with some extra hides and decor to help the snake feel more secure.

Enclosure height is a frequently debated topic in regards to ball pythons. Many people say these snakes are like "pet rocks" and will spend all of their time on the ground, mostly hiding. In the wild, though, these snakes are active semi-arboreal hunters. If you give your ball python vertical climbing space, it will absolutely be utilized. Your snake will be happier and healthier from the enrichment and exercise. The absolute bare minimum enclosure height recommended, regardless of enclosure type (yes, that includes storage tubs), is 24 inches. This height will easily accommodate a few inches of substrate, some climbing opportunities, and heat lamps mounted inside the enclosure on the ceiling (in a solid-topped PVC or wood cage). Taller enclosures can be a great way to provide even more climbing opportunities, but be mindful of how you will maintain an appropriate heat gradient at the substrate surface; the more vertical space you have, the more complicated it will be to heat the enclosure for a snake who spends most of their time on the ground.

Hides

Since ball pythons are generally terrestrial snakes when at rest, appropriate hiding places are crucial. If your ball python does not have adequate places to hide, they will become stressed, and stress quickly snowballs into bigger problems such as refusing to eat and becoming susceptible to illness. A minimum of two hides should be provided, one for the warm side and one for the cool side. Extra hides should be provided if there is space to do so.

When you are buying (or making) hides for your ball python, choose hides that are:

1. **Snug**, with little to no empty space around the snake. Ball pythons feel most secure when their entire body is touching their hiding place on all sides, including the top. Hides that are too wide and/or too tall will make your ball python feel vulnerable, because in the wild they could be easily pulled out of that large space by a predator. Hides that are a little too large can be stuffed with extra substrate to make them feel more snug.

2. **Enclosed**, with only one entrance that's just big enough for the snake to pass through. Remember, the point of hides is to allow your snake to be hidden! If you can see a lot or all of your snake's body through the hide entrance, your snake won't feel secure.
3. Ideally, the primary warm and cool hides should be identical - or at least very similar - except for the temperature. This way, the snake feels equally comfortable in both hides and won't have to prioritize security over thermoregulation. If you are providing extra hides in a larger enclosure, you can add more variety of hide designs.

Hides like open-ended tubes or half logs, or very tall hides like the tree stump style, should not be used for primary hides. These types of hides are too open and leave the snake feeling vulnerable to predators. These types of hides can be used as extra clutter, though, since they provide good ground cover for a snake on the move.

Temperatures, Heat, & Light

As with any other reptile, ball pythons are ectotherms, meaning they cannot regulate their own body temperature and consequently rely on their environment to help them warm up or cool down as needed. A vital part of ball python husbandry is maintaining appropriate temperature zones in the enclosure. Remember, your snake only has access to what you provide for them, so it is your job to recreate the basic necessities they would have access to in their natural habitat.

Warm side: 88F-92F / 31C-33C. Temperatures above 95F/35C can cause injuries with prolonged exposure, and temperatures below 88F/31C can prevent a ball python from digesting properly.

Cool side: 76F-80F / 24C-26C. Temperatures above 80F/26C will not allow a ball python to cool down adequately, and temperatures below 75F/23C can compromise their immune system.

A digital thermometer/hygrometer combo is great for monitoring ambient temperatures and humidity. A digital infrared thermometer (also known as a laser thermometer or temperature gun) will allow you to get accurate pinpoint temperature readings in any nook or cranny of the enclosure, and it is especially useful in accurately measuring the floor temperature when a UTH is being used. When you are checking temperatures, remember that your ball python primarily lives on the floor of the enclosure, not on the wall or hovering way up in the air. Always check the temperatures your snake is actually exposed to in the areas where they spend most of their time.

Now let's talk about heat sources. Lightless heating options include under tank heaters (UTH), ceramic heat emitters (CHE), deep heat projectors (DHP), and radiant heat panels (RHP). Halogen lights provide the most natural and effective heating, but they should only be used during daylight hours and turned off at night. Which type(s) of heat sources you need will depend on your enclosure type and size, your room temperature range, as well as your own preferences.

Myth: "Ball pythons need belly heat from a UTH!"

Truth: There is nothing special about the way heat is absorbed through the belly, and plenty of arguments can be made for UTHs not being the best way for snakes to receive heat. Use the heat source(s) that work for your enclosure and general heating needs.

UTHs are the most popular heating option because of convenience; they can be used in many types of enclosures including tubs, tanks, and PVC cages. Contrary to their popularity, UTHs are not a great heat source for ball pythons (or any other reptile) as they are designed to only heat the surface to which they are attached, providing little to no ambient heat and only heating the animal's belly. This type of heat source is best used for temporary or quarantine enclosures, or as an emergency back-up heat source in the event of your ambient heat source breaking and a replacement not being readily available. If you are using a UTH for the warm side, choose one that covers one-third to one-half of the floor area. If you use a second UTH for the cool side, choose one that covers most or all of the remaining floor space. A UTH or two might provide enough heat to raise the ambient temperature above room temperature by a couple of degrees if the enclosure is well-insulated, but they should not be relied upon to maintain ambient temperatures in a cooler room. If your room temperature tends to be cold, and/or your enclosure is not insulated, you will need to choose an ambient/radiant heat source, or maybe even use more than one heat source, to maintain appropriate temperatures in the enclosure.

RHPs are ideal for wood or PVC reptile cages that 1) have a solid top, not a screen top, and 2) need a little boost in ambient temperatures, especially on the cool side of the gradient. RHPs can even be used in large tubs with lids sturdy enough to support the weight of the panel. An RHP of the correct wattage, in a well-insulated and well-proportioned enclosure, can be used as the sole heat source at night. Since RHPs are better as a secondary heat source, you will still need a heat lamp with either a DHP or a halogen flood light on the warm side for daytime.

DHPs and CHEs in ceramic base dome lamps are useful for glass tanks and other screen-topped enclosures. If you have a simple ceramic socket fixture with a wire guard cage, DHPs and CHEs can be used inside a wood or PVC cage, or a tub with a sturdy lid, if the enclosure is at least 20 inches tall to accommodate the height of the fixture and guard cage. A CHE can be used to maintain an overall ambient temperature or create the full temperature gradient, while a DHP is better suited for a warm side / basking spot. The benefit of a DHP or CHE over other popular types of heat lamps is that these heat bulbs do not emit any light, so they can be used 24/7 without disrupting the snake's day/night cycle. There is no evidence proving snakes cannot see the light of red, blue, blacklight or moonlight bulbs, so using those types of heat lamps at night can cause stress.

No matter what type of heat source you use, it absolutely must be regulated by a thermostat to ensure appropriate and safe temperatures. An unregulated UTH, for example, can easily produce temperatures over 120F, which is hot enough to cause severe burns on a ball python's belly. Unregulated CHEs or RHPs could lead to the entire enclosure being too hot and your snake overheating. Most heat sources will not come with their own thermostat, so you have to purchase one separately. The thermostat probe placement will depend, once again, on what type of enclosure and heat source you are using.

Important note: A thermostat is not the same thing as a thermometer.

A thermostat monitors temperature and regulates the heat source as necessary to maintain the specific temperature you have set it to maintain. A thermometer only measures temperature. Additionally, a rheostat (aka dimmer) is not an adequate replacement for a thermostat.

Rheostats only control the power output of a device, they will not make automatic adjustments as temperatures fluctuate.

With a UTH, the thermostat probe can be set up outside the enclosure, secured directly to the bottom of the UTH with some heat-safe tape. **Never, under any circumstances, use tape or other sticky adhesives inside the enclosure, as they are dangerous and potentially deadly to your snake.** If the thermostat probe is on

the bottom of the UTH, you may have to adjust the temperature setting a few degrees higher than your goal temperature, since some of the heat will be absorbed and dispersed by the floor. The goal is to heat the enclosure floor itself, not the substrate surface. If your substrate is a few inches deep, your floor temperature will have to be dangerously hot in order to create an adequate temperature on the substrate surface, and it will only be a matter of time before your snake pushes the substrate aside and is in direct contact with the floor. The easiest way to avoid these discrepancies is to remove most of the substrate from inside the warm hide, so you know exactly what temperature your snake is exposed to in there. Always double-check your surface temperatures with an infrared thermometer.

For an RHP, DHP, or CHE, the thermostat probe can be dangled in the air within a few inches below the heat lamp, secured along the cord to hold it in place, positioned directly underneath the beam of the heat source. The important thing is that the thermostat probe does not get blocked by decor, or the snake resting on top of decor, as this can cause the thermostat to crank up the heat too much. Double-check your surface temperatures and hide temperatures, and adjust your thermostat settings as needed to achieve the correct gradient.

Now, let's take a moment to talk about lights. Many people say ball pythons do not need any lights and will not benefit from UVB lighting. While it is true that ball pythons are predominantly nocturnal, they will be active for brief periods during the day, and will bask (perhaps partially hidden) under a UVB light if one is provided. Regardless of whether or not you provide UVB, basic lighting such as LEDs can be beneficial for a day/night cycle, especially if the enclosure is in a room with little or no natural light. Even in a well-lit room, sometimes it's just nice to have some extra light in the enclosure for your own convenience. If you do provide UVB, keep in mind that these lights often produce a fair amount of heat, so make sure all of your heat sources are working well together throughout the day/night cycle.

Halogen flood lights with a wide beam angle can be used to provide daytime heat and light that closely mimics the heat of the sun. When using halogen lights for daytime heat, you may need a secondary heat source to provide nighttime heat without disrupting the snake's day/night cycle. A halogen for the day and a DHP or RHP for the night is the best combination. Note: with most heat sources, choosing a wattage that's a little stronger than you need will help extend the lifespan of the bulb or panel, but with halogen flood lights you should choose the lowest possible wattage to achieve your goal temperature. These bulbs are not designed to be dimmed much, so choosing the lowest possible wattage and using a dimming thermostat with a bask assist feature will prevent flickering light and extend the lifespan of the bulb.

[Click here for the All About Heating for Ball Pythons guide, which takes a deeper dive into the science behind all of these heat sources.](#)

Humidity & Water

Hydration, clean sheds, and good respiratory health, are all heavily dependent on humidity. For ball pythons, the ideal humidity level is in the 70%-80% range, as this is the typical humidity level of their natural habitat in the tropical savannas of Africa. Many people say 60% is adequate, and some individuals may tolerate this humidity level, but it's not uncommon for ball pythons to show signs of dehydration at 60% humidity.

Myth: "High humidity causes respiratory infections!"

Truth: While that may be true for species from arid climates, it is not true for tropical species.

Low humidity is the most common cause of respiratory infections in ball pythons.

A dry environment causes the mucous membranes to dry and crack, leading to bacterial infections.

Humidity below 60% can cause health problems such as dehydration (which often results in bad sheds) and respiratory infections. Humidity above 80% is not necessarily harmful by itself, but an enclosure with lots of condensation and a constantly wet substrate surface can lead to scale rot, so it's important to maintain a balance between the humidity being high enough and the surfaces in the enclosure not being too wet.

Now the question is, how do you maintain high humidity levels without compromising the health of the snake? Many beginners struggle with humidity more than any other aspect of ball python husbandry, often because their enclosure has too much ventilation, allowing all the humidity to escape the enclosure. This is an extremely common problem with aquariums or other glass tanks with screen tops, but some modifications can help. Covering the screen top with something non-porous (such as aluminum foil), taping it down around the edges (outside the tank, never use tape inside) to seal it up, and cutting out a narrow ventilation strip totalling 6-12 square inches will help the tank retain humidity while still providing fresh air for your snake. If you use a PVC reptile cage, most are designed to have this kind of minimal ventilation, allowing them to retain humidity very easily.

If you find that reduced ventilation is not enough by itself, the next piece to the humidity puzzle is substrate. Water-friendly substrates (see the next section for recommendations) will allow you to easily add more moisture to the enclosure. Use a deep layer of substrate, at least 2-4 inches, and saturate portions of the substrate. Pouring a quart or two of water directly into the substrate will be more effective than misting/spraying water on the surface. The goal here is to create a gradual release of humidity via evaporation. If you spray a little bit of water on the surface of the substrate, it will evaporate very quickly, causing a sharp spike in humidity which will drop within a few hours. Saturating the substrate all the way through means the water will evaporate more slowly, helping the humidity to remain higher and more stable for a much longer period of time. Be sure to keep the hide areas dry to avoid scale rot.

Foggers, misters, and humidifiers, tend to create a constantly wet environment. Unlike the substrate maintenance described in the previous paragraph, these devices will not allow you to easily control where the water will collect, and your snake could develop scale rot as a result of the hide areas being too damp. If you are struggling with humidity, try to address your humidity issues in other ways before considering one of these devices.

Always choose a water dish that is at least big enough for the snake to soak in it. Not only will this help your humidity via a larger surface area of water to evaporate, it is also beneficial for the snake to have the option to soak. However, if you see your ball python soaking in the water dish, take it as a sign that something is wrong with your snake, your husbandry, or both. Ball pythons will soak in the water if they are feeling dehydrated, particularly when they are getting ready to shed. They will also soak if they are overheating due to the enclosure being too warm. Soaking can also be a sign of a mite infestation, as the snake attempts to escape the mites by drowning them.

[Click here for the All About Shedding guide, which includes general information about hydration.](#)

Substrate

So many types of substrate to choose from, but which ones are the best? A lot of it boils down to – you guessed it – the rest of your set up and your own personal preferences, though there are some you should absolutely stay away from at all costs.

Substrates you should **definitely not** use:

- Pine, cedar, and other heavily aromatic woods. The oils in these woods that make them smell nice to us will cause serious health problems for snakes with prolonged exposure, ranging from skin irritation to respiratory infections to liver damage.
- Sand, walnut shell, and corn cob. These substrates are abrasive, causing irritation to the snake's eyes and cloaca, as well as posing a serious impaction risk when ingested.
- Reptile carpet, Astroturf, etc.. These are extremely difficult to sanitize, leading to bacteria build-up that remains even after cleaning.
- Aspen. This one is highly debated among snake keepers. I personally do not recommend aspen as it is a very dry wood which molds easily in humid environments. I have also found it to be very drying and irritating to the snake's scales.

Substrates that are **water-friendly**, good for enclosures that need damp substrate:

- Coconut husk mulch.
- Cypress mulch.
- Organic topsoil. Check labels carefully to make sure there are no fertilizers or pesticides.
- Coconut fiber, with the caveat that it is extremely dusty when dry.
- Fir bark mulch.
- Sphagnum moss, not necessarily practical as the sole substrate but can be mixed with the above substrates. Also great for humid hides.

Any of these can be mixed together to create different aesthetics and alter the intensity of the overall substrate's water-retention.

Substrates that are okay for simple set-ups as long as they are kept dry and clean, and feedings are closely supervised to avoid large pieces of these substrates being swallowed:

- Paper towels, unprinted newspaper, craft paper, etc.
- Paper bedding for small animals, such as Carefresh.

Feeding

Frozen/thawed Norway rats are the most common, convenient, and practical prey for ball pythons in captivity. However, these snakes can also eat other small mammals (such as African soft-furred rats, gerbils, hamsters, etc.) and birds (such as baby chickens or quail). Field studies have shown ball pythons, especially juveniles and smaller adults, consume more avian prey than mammalian prey. Offering some variety in your snake's diet can provide enrichment and more well-rounded nutrition.

A digital kitchen scale is an invaluable tool for any snake owner, as weighing your snake regularly is good for 1) easily choosing the right prey size, instead of eyeballing and guesswork, and 2) monitoring your snake's health by tracking any weight gain or loss. The generally foolproof way to determine the appropriate rat size for your ball python is to use weight percentages. Now, depending on who you ask, the weight percentages you get might be more conservative or more aggressive. The following guidelines fall in the middle of the spectrum leaning toward being more conservative.

- 0-12 months old **OR** until the snake reaches approximately 500g, whichever happens first: feed 10%-15% of the snake's weight every 7 days.
- 12-24 months old **OR** until the snake's weight remains consistent for 2 months: feed up to 7% of the snake's weight every 14-20 days.
- Adults: feed up to 5% of the snake's weight every 20-30 days, or feed slightly larger meals (up to 6%) every 30-40 days.

Note: When feeding birds, use lower weight percentages! This guideline is a good starting point for mammalian prey, but birds are much lighter relative to the overall size of their body, so using the same weight formula would result in a meal that's too large for the snake to safely swallow. Start with half the percentage in this guideline, and use the shorter end of the schedule recommendation.

What this essentially means, for most individual ball pythons, is that once they are eating small adult rats (typically weighing 50-90 grams), they will stay at that prey size unless they grow to be a particularly large adult. Remember that this is a basic guideline, and your individual ball python may need higher or lower weight percentages depending on their metabolism, exercise, etc.. These weight percentages are not set in stone, they are simply a starting point in figuring out an appropriate prey size for your ball python. Some variation in prey size is not a bad thing, so you have some wiggle room when buying feeders that may not be exactly the right weight down to the gram. Schedule variation is also healthy and natural for the snake, so don't worry about having to delay feeding day now and then, or missing the occasional feeding day altogether.

A ball python at a healthy weight will have a softly rounded triangular shape to their body, a clearly defined neck and a smooth taper from body to tail, and will feel muscular and strong as they move. If your ball python is looking more round than triangular, it may be time to reduce prey weight and/or space out feedings more. If your ball python is looking more sharply triangular, with the spine being prominent and sides of the body being straight or slightly concave, it's time to increase prey size.

[**Click here for the Body Tone of Python Regius guide for more detailed information with photo examples for ball python weight and body condition assessment.**](#)

When feeding your ball python, remember this is a mostly nocturnal species. If you offer food in the middle of the day, it is likely to be completely ignored. Feeding after sunset will increase the likelihood that your ball python will be interested and ready to eat. Set yourself up for success by following the natural behavior patterns of your pet.

Now that you have a good idea of *what* and *when* to feed your ball python, now let's talk about *where* to feed your ball python. Browsing various care sheets, discussion forums, etc, will lead you to a lot of conflicting information on where you should feed your snake, inside the enclosure versus a separate feeding area.

Let's break down some myths, pros, and cons.

Commonly stated pros of feeding outside of the enclosure:

- Feeding in the enclosure causes cage aggression, the snake will always assume your hand is food. **This is a myth.** The truth is, the only way your hand will be mistaken for food is if your hand smells like a rat, mouse, or whatever prey type you feed your ball python, or if you literally only reach into the enclosure to feed the snake. Both of these issues are easily avoided. Wash your hands thoroughly after handling prey. Keep up with regular enclosure maintenance like spot-cleaning, cleaning and refilling water dishes, etc.. Handle your snake at least once a month for a thorough health check. To be extra sure you are never mistaken as food, you can "tap train" your snake by teaching them that when you gently tap/stroke them with a snake hook or other object, it is time to be handled, not time to eat.
- No risk of substrate ingestion. This is not actually a big pro, because substrate ingestion is nowhere near as big of a deal as many people think. As long as you are using an appropriate substrate, a little dirt or mulch is not going to kill your snake. If you are really concerned about this risk, it is easily mitigated when feeding inside the enclosure by using a plate, placemat, or other barrier on top of the substrate.

The real cons of feeding outside of the enclosure:

- **Stress.** Every time you remove your ball python from the enclosure, generally speaking, you are causing some degree of stress. Stressed snakes are less likely to eat. When you feed outside of the enclosure, you're taking your snake out of the environment where they feel safe and placing them in an environment where they are (in their minds) exposed to any number of potential dangers. Snakes are particularly vulnerable to predators when they are eating, because they cannot escape quickly or defend themselves in the middle of swallowing their prey, so they will often choose not to eat if they feel it is too much of a risk.
- **Biting.** Handling a snake who is in feeding mode is a great way to receive a feeding bite, where the snake holds on and may even constrict. Alternatively, you may receive defensive bites, or "tags", because your snake is stressed and feeling vulnerable.
- **Regurgitation.** If your ball python does eat outside of the enclosure, you then have the risk that they will regurgitate from the physical activity and/or general stress of being moved before and after eating. It is important to leave a snake alone for at least a couple of days after a meal, because it takes a lot of time and physical resources to digest that meal. Being disturbed with a full belly can cause a snake to regurgitate, which is extremely hard on their digestive system, and can quickly spiral into a deadly problem if not treated properly.

When weighing the risks against the benefits, it is pretty clear that feeding in the enclosure is the best option for both you and your snake.

[Click here for the Feeding Problems and Solutions guide, including tips and tricks for dealing with fussy eaters.](#)

Be sure to check out all the supplementary links for more detailed information!

This guide was written by u/_ataraxia for r/ballpython.