

## **Body Tone of Python regius (Royal/Ball Pythons)**

*NOTE: Breeding females will not follow these guidelines during breeding season. The following discussion assumes we are talking about non-breeding adults, and in the off-season females should be held to these standards.*

### **--Spine Shape--**

What this really refers to is the shape of the body in cross section. A healthy adult royal will have a lean, rounded triangle shape. Fat is naturally stored on the belly and to the sides, not up towards the spine. The spine should be bordered by muscle, giving it a nice rounded peak.

A fully round body shape throughout the body is a sign of obesity, and a spine that is concave rather than convex is even worse. Try to make these judgments at the mid body, near the neck the muscles may sit higher on the spine making it look concave and towards the tail the body naturally rounds out.

A sharp spine may be a sign of being underweight, but not always. If the snake is mostly round with just a sharp spine sticking up, it may actually have too much fat and not enough muscle. Dehydration can also make the snakes look underweight due to saggy skin. This is also why it's important to look at the other characteristics before deciding on the body tone.

### **--Curves--**

This refers to the behavior of the skin in a curve. (A curve being when the snake is bending to the side, like left or right, not when they are bending down such as if a human tried to touch their toes). On the inside of a tight curve, the skin should fold. If the folds look "filled in", those are fat rolls. Folds good, rolls bad. Sharp folds that look wrinkly when the snake is stretched out may indicate dehydration.

The outside of a tight curve may show some scale separation that reveals the skin between the scales, but not a lot. The scales should absolutely not be separated anywhere other than the outside of a tight curve, or when it's otherwise temporarily stretched (recently fed, gravid, etc).

### **--Head Size--**

The size of the head in relation to the body can clue you in to the overall feeding history of the snake. If the snake is overfed from a young age, the body can outgrow the head. If it is stunted, the head may look overly large. In general, the body of an adult royal should be 2-3x wider than the head. Males will sometimes be on the lower end of that ratio, females on the upper end.

Babies start with the bodies just barely wider than the heads, if at all. So this ratio grows with age. On the note of young snakes, it is harder to judge as they are constantly growing. Unless they're on the extreme ends of the scale it's not too much to worry about until they reach about a year of age.

### **--Tail Taper or Hips--**

Fat builds in the second half of the body first, in front of the vent, and travels up towards the head. In a healthy fit royal, the body thickness will taper down nicely from the mid body all the way to the tip of the tail, with the vent only slightly noticeable. If the thickness abruptly shrinks right at the vent, then there is fat build up starting. These excess fat deposits are often referred to as “hips”. It could also be a bowel movement ready to go, so when making this judgement make sure the snake isn't due for a BM.

--Belly and Skin--

A concave belly usually indicates an underweight animal, though sometimes when they tense up it can contract the muscles. If the stomach is consistently concave though then that is definitely an indicator. Loose saggy skin can be an indicator of dehydration and/or low weight.

--What to do about this?--

If your snake is overweight then look at your feeding frequency and prey size. Many overweight adults are fed too often and are not given space to stretch and climb. Feeding once every 14 days is plenty soon enough and many older adults can be fed less often, and of course giving them the ability to stay in shape with branches, a large enclosure, and outside of the cage time will help burn calories and build muscles. Wild adults are quite lean and muscular and according to field reports/studies eat about once a month, and obviously our captive snakes aren't forced to roam for suitable hiding spots or prey! Obesity can lead to long term health issues including a shortened life span, so it is a very serious issue to be aware of! If your snake is minorly underweight then a normal feeding schedule should get them back on track. If they're seriously underweight then you'll want a slower approach. Feeding too much or too often can lead to regurgitations, and slow weight gain is the safer way regardless, even for humans. u/\_ataraxia has experience with malnourished snakes and has info you can seek separately. And keep in mind that feeding charts are only *guidelines*, each individual snake will differ on how they should be fed!

### **Examples of Wild Snakes**

These should give some insight into what they look like as well as some habitat inspiration.

- Link to youtube showing a wild caught youngish adult judging by the size <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouO6hgveGKk>
- Blurry video but shows two adult males and an adult female from the same burrow found during the breeding season. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7zerETOAvM>
- Long video, but great! Shows multiple snakes, the habitat, burrows, eggs, temps, etc. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZqZGHtizeI>
- Shows a wild snake swimming <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7aGBMsolKs>





**Charts**  
**Body**  
created

**and Images of**  
**Tone** - both  
by Liam Wulfe

**Signs and Symptoms of Obesity in Python Regius**



Examples of Snakes

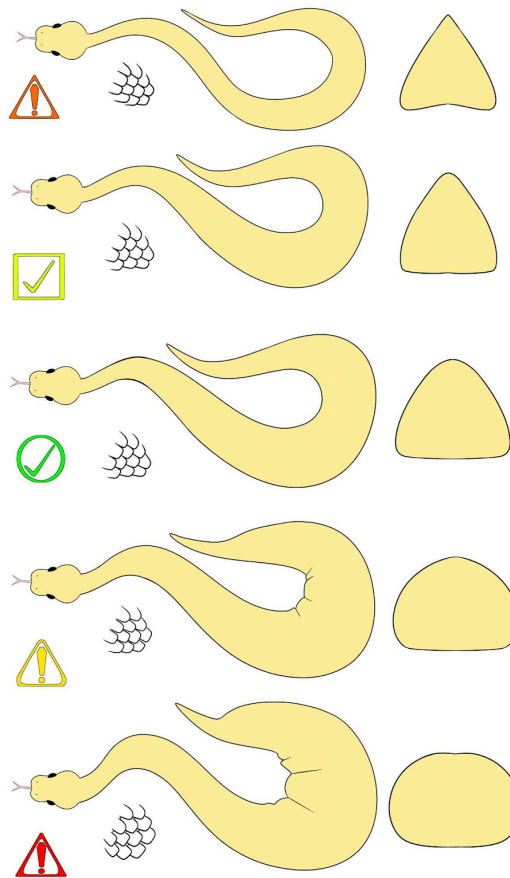
**UNDERWEIGHT**  
 -Neck is thin and wrinkly.  
 -Body has no thick point.  
 -Spine is sharp and visible.  
 -Stomach is concave or flat.  
 -Tail is thinner before the vent than it is after the vent.

**SLIM**  
 -Neck is slim, slightly wrinkled.  
 -Body has a slight thick point.  
 -Spine is visible, but not sharp.  
 -Stomach is flat, not concave.  
 -Tail is gradual, but thin.  
 -Common shape of juveniles.

**IDEAL**  
 -Neck is slim, but full.  
 -Body is noticeably thick.  
 -Spine is rounded, triangular.  
 -Stomach does not cave in.  
 -No fat wrinkles when coiled.  
 -Tail slopes gradually into the body, and evenly to the end.

**OVERWEIGHT**  
 -Neck is thick and full.  
 -Head is reasonably smaller than the body's thick point.  
 -Spine is round, barely visible.  
 -Wrinkles appear when coiled.  
 -Tail has an obvious collection of fat before the vent.

**OBESE**  
 -Neck is too fat and obvious.  
 -Head is significantly smaller than the body's thick point.  
 -Spine is not visible at all.  
 -Large fat rolls when coiled.  
 -Tail has a large collection of fat before the vent.



Underweight





### Examples of Overweight Snakes

