

Ball Python Care Guide: Feeding

A practical care guide based on real breeding and keeping experience.

Feeding your Ball Python correctly is an important part of maintaining its health and wellbeing. This guide explains suitable feeding methods, equipment, prey size, and what to do if your snake refuses food.

Ball Pythons are well known for occasionally being selective or inconsistent feeders. In most cases this behaviour is linked to environmental conditions or individual preference, and with the correct approach most feeding issues can be resolved.

1. Feeding Equipment

Having the correct feeding equipment helps make feeding safe and easy for both you and your snake.

The following items are recommended when feeding Ball Pythons:

Electric kettle

Used to produce steam to warm the prey item when using the steaming method.

Feeding Tongs or Tweezers

These allow you to offer the prey item safely while keeping your hands away from the snake's strike.

Recommended sizes:

Adult Ball Pythons: **18 inch Feeding Tongs**

Hatchling and juvenile Ball Pythons: **12 inch Feeding Tweezers**

Using feeding tongs also prevents the snake from accidentally striking your hand during feeding.

2. The Steaming Method

The steaming method is a very effective way of warming frozen rodents before feeding and can be particularly helpful with fussy feeders.

Step 1 – Defrost the rodent

Allow the frozen rodent to fully thaw at room temperature. The prey item should be completely defrosted before it is warmed.

Step 2 – Prepare the kettle

Place an electric kettle close to the enclosure where your snake is housed. The kettle should ideally be in the same room so that the prey item can be offered immediately after heating.

Begin boiling the kettle.

Step 3 – Warm the rodent using steam

Using your feeding tongs, hold the rodent around the middle of its back.

Once the kettle begins producing steam, place the **head of the rodent into the steam coming from the kettle spout** for approximately **10 seconds**. This warms the head of the rodent, which helps the snake detect the prey through both heat and scent.

Step 4 – Offer the rodent

Offer the rodent to the snake as soon as possible after heating it. Present the rodent slowly and calmly in front of the snake so that it can detect the scent and heat.

For less confident snakes, it can help to hold the rodent around the middle of its back. Holding it by the base of the tail can sometimes appear more intimidating to shy feeders.

For stronger or more enthusiastic feeders, holding the rodent by the tail can reduce the chance of the snake striking the feeding tongs.

If the snake does not strike

If the snake shows interest (for example tongue flicking) but does not immediately grab the rodent, you can repeat the steaming process and offer the rodent again.

This can be attempted **up to three times**.

If the snake still does not take the rodent, you can leave the rodent inside the enclosure overnight if it is safe to do so and there is no risk of escape.

Check the enclosure in the morning. If the rodent has not been eaten, it should be removed and disposed of. Wait **approximately seven days** before attempting to feed again.

3. Feeding Schedule and Prey Size

Ball Pythons should be fed prey items that are an appropriate size for the snake.

A common guideline is to feed a prey item that is roughly **the same width as the thickest part of the snake's body**, or slightly smaller.

Typical feeding schedules are:

Hatchlings and young juveniles

Feed every **5–7 days**

Growing juveniles

Feed every **7 days**

Sub-adult and adult Ball Pythons

Feed every **7–14 days**

Some adult Ball Pythons naturally eat less frequently, and occasional fasting periods can be normal.

4. Problem Feeders – Tips to try

Ball Pythons can sometimes be selective feeders. If your snake refuses food, the following tips may help encourage feeding.

Try feeding at night

Ball Pythons are naturally more active during the evening and night, so feeding later in the day can often improve feeding response.

Ensure the environment is quiet

Feeding in a calm, quiet room can reduce stress and make the snake more comfortable taking food.

Try different prey types

Some Ball Pythons develop preferences for certain prey species. Common prey items include:

- Rats
- Mice
- Multimammate mice (African Soft Furred Rats)
- Gerbils

Occasionally chicks can be used to help restart feeding, but chicks alone do not provide a complete long-term diet for Ball Pythons. Once feeding resumes, it is best to transition the snake back to rodents.

5. Other things to consider if your Ball Python refuses food

If your snake refuses food for an extended period, it is important to review the overall setup and husbandry.

Enclosure size

Ball Pythons feel most secure in environments that provide plenty of cover. If the enclosure is too large or lacks hiding places the snake may feel stressed and refuse food.

Further guidance on enclosure setup can be found in the **Ball Python Housing Care Guide**.

Hides

Ball Pythons require secure hides to feel safe. The hide should be only slightly larger than the snake so that it feels snug and secure.

If the snake is inside its hide when food is offered, avoid removing the hide. This can cause unnecessary stress. Instead, try gently presenting the warmed rodent near the entrance of the hide so the snake can detect the scent and heat.

Some Ball Pythons will only strike prey from within their hide where they feel most secure.

Temperatures

Incorrect temperatures are one of the most common reasons for feeding problems.

Always check that the enclosure temperatures are correct and that the snake has access to both a warm area and a cooler area within the enclosure.

Using an infrared temperature gun can make checking temperatures quick and accurate.

Prey size

Offering prey that is too large can intimidate a Ball Python and lead to refusal. Always ensure the prey size is appropriate for the snake.

If a snake has refused food for several weeks despite correct temperatures and husbandry, trying a different prey type may help stimulate feeding.

6. A note on feeding behaviour

Ball Pythons are known for occasionally going through natural fasting periods. This behaviour is common, particularly in adult snakes, and does not always indicate a health problem.

As long as the snake appears healthy, maintains good body condition, and husbandry conditions are correct, short feeding strikes are usually nothing to worry about.

However, if a snake refuses food for an extended period and begins losing weight or showing signs of illness, advice should be sought from a qualified reptile veterinarian.
