

Mountain View Animal Hospital
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YOUR PET SNAKE

Snakes can be found on every continent except Antarctica. They can be found on land, water, marine, or in the trees. Snakes differ from other reptiles in that they don't have legs, lack movable eyelids, and external ear openings. Their life span can be as long as 30-40 years. There are many different species with different physical needs. Therefore, new reptile owners should do their research on there species they pick.

Environment:

Snakes should be able to move around freely up and down and stretch out fully. Aquariums or wood with plexiglass enclosures work well. Avoid using wire or large screen screening, as snakes will often rub or strike and cause serious harm to themselves. Be sure to tape or lock the lid to make sure your snake does not escape.

Cage Substrate:

Newspapers or astroturf are suitable substrates for snakes. With whatever substrate you choose make sure it is changed after it is soiled. The enclosure and props should be cleaned with a very dilute-chlorine bleach and water solution once every one to two weeks.

Cage accessories:

Snakes like having things to climb on or go under to feel safe. Tree branches and rock are great accessories. Having a large water bowl is also good to let your snake soak and help with shedding.

Heating:

Snakes require an outside form of heat to keep their body temperatures regulated. You can use a heating pad under the cage, a heat lamp on top, or "hot rocks" in the cage. The optimum temperature varies with the species, but most species do well at 75-80 degrees Fahrenheit. For any species a thermometer is recommended.

Lighting:

A "vita-lite" or "black light" is absolutely essential to reptile husbandry. Snakes MUST be exposed to the full spectrum of light for at least 12 hours per day. If a black light is used for a substitute it must be on for thirty minutes per day. The light should be shielded from the snake by using a soft plastic mesh or screen. Glass or plastic should not be used because they filter out important ultraviolet lights. The bulbs should be replaced every 6 months. The lights should be placed no more than four feet above the snake. Natural sunlight is always best and can help anorexic snakes eat. Your snake may become more active and aggressive with natural sunlight. A snake must have 12 hours of darkness per day.

Humidity:

Humidity needs vary with the species, ranging from 35-70%. Most species tend to do well between 60-70% humidity. Some ways of delivering water to the enclosure include plant misters, water dishes, or swim dishes. These temperatures will also assist your snake during his shedding process.

Diet:

Depending on the species of snake you chose will depend on the dietary requirement. Regardless on the species, NEVER feed live prey (other than insects) to your snake. Severe injuries and infection can occur due to the prey biting and chewing on the snake. Snakes should be fed once every 1-2 weeks.

Shedding:

Healthy snakes shed their skin 4-8 times per year. The frequency of shedding depends on many things like the humidity, temperature, growth rate, feeding frequency, and age. Snakes should shed in one piece beginning with the nose and ending with the tail. Patchy shedding or retained eye caps are abnormal. After shedding there is a 1-2 week period of opacity during which the skin becomes dull and dry and the eye scales become milky in color. Your snake should not be handled during this time. Snakes tend to be more defensive due to it's reduced vision and you may damage the new skin.

Handling:

Your snake will benefit from routine handling if done properly and at the right times. You should not handle your snake 24-48 hours after feeding because it could cause regurgitation. Always hold your snake with two hands to support the entire spine.

Signs of Illness:

Open mouth breathing, wheezing, nasal discharge, excessive salivation, abnormal feces, difficult shedding, swelling, visible lesions, and parasites are all signs of illness. If you notice any of these with your snake make an appointment with your veterinarian as soon as possible.

	Rodents	Crickets/ grasshoppers	Birds	Snakes/ Lizards	Fish	Toads/ Frogs	Slugs/ Worms	Salamanders
Boas, Pythons, Rat Snake, Gopher, & Bull Snake	X		X	X				
Garter, Ribbon, & Water snakes					X	X	X	X
Indigo, Racers, & King snakes		X		X	X		X	
Ring-neck & Brown snakes					X			X
Racers, Coachwhips, & Vine snakes	X	X	X	X				