



Brighton Veterinary Surgery

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CARPET PYTHON (*Morelia spilota*) CARE

HEATING

All physiological functions in reptiles rely on heat.

This includes appetite, activity levels, immune function, reproductive function and digestion. Heating should be provided for 24hr a day, 365 days a year.

If you are worried about providing light during the night or interrupted sleep for you or your reptile, a ceramic globe is a good option as this provides heating without visible light. When using heat lights, it is important to ensure that it is surrounded by a light protector/ cage so that your python is not tempted to coil directly around it for warmth.

Never used electrically heated "hot rocks" or heat pads, as these can lead to very serious thermal burns. Reptiles have evolved to absorb radiant heat from above (eg the sun), therefore are darker on top and lighter under their belly – they have very poor heat and pain receptors under their belly so can sit and burn themselves without knowing.

A basking spot should be available at all times around 36°C and the hot end should be around 32°C. The cool end should sit between 17-20°C, year round. Place thermometer probes at each of the three locations so you can ensure these temperatures are maintained. Cooling reptiles during the winter months is not recommended, as it often leads to prolonged cooling which may induce immunosuppression, and lead to disease.

Enclosure temperatures should be measured daily to ensure the appropriate thermal gradient is provided. Some thermostats have 2 probes which records the hottest and coolest temperatures over the last 24 hours, these are ideal. As with all electrical devices, thermostats can dysfunction – so a separate thermometer is recommended to ensure that the temperature readings on the thermostat are accurate.

Provide a water bowl in the cool end – large enough to bathe in. Regular misting is not required, and excessive humidity may lead to disease. Providing basking areas and hides is also a good idea to keep your python happy, as well as some vertical space (branches etc.) for basking and climbing, and accessing the UV light and thermal gradient.

Ensure that your enclosure is escape-proof!

UVB LIGHT

There is no substitute for direct access to real, unfiltered sunlight. We encourage taking your reptile outside for supervised access to the sun for 20-30 minutes 3-5 times weekly. Ensure that shade is provided in order to avoid overheating. UVB is ideal to ensure appropriate calcium metabolism, and calcium metabolism is important for skeletal health, muscle health and for digestion.

Although somewhat controversial, we strongly suggest that you provide your python with artificial ultraviolet light -B (UVB) by providing a UVB globe during daylight hours, all year round. It is important to note that UVB light itself, is invisible. For this reason it is recommended to change the UVB globe every 6 months – even if it is still giving off visible light. An alternative option is to purchase your own UVB reader to ensure that output is adequate at the time of purchase and for the lifespan of the globe. UVB doesn't travel through glass, Perspex etc. so ensure nothing is in between your UV globe and your reptile – this means that the reptile gets no functional UVB from sunlight through a window or plastic enclosure lid. For the globe to be effective, it needs to be placed within 30-40 cm from your reptile. Even wire mesh can reduce UVB by 10-50% (black mesh less than silver).

CALCIUM SUPPLEMENTATION

UVB is absorbed through the skin and works with calcium in the diet to build a healthy and strong skeleton. So that the UVB can do the best job possible it is important that all fuzzy rats are dusted with calcium carbonate dust (without phosphorous or vitamin D) *immediately* prior to feeding.

FEEDING

Feeding live prey is illegal in Australia and is considered inhumane for both the prey and the predator involved. Good quality rodents fed on high quality diets. Avoid large fatty meals. Avoid overfeeding as can lead to obesity and illness.

Hatchlings and juveniles are fed every 7- 10 days and subadults to adults are fed approximately every 2 weeks. A prey item appropriate for the size of the snake should be fed at each meal (no larger than their girth of the snake at mid-body). A good rule of thumb is to feed your snake 10% of the snakes' body weight every 2 weeks- i.e. a 1 kg should be fed a 100 gram rat.

Young mice are a good starter prey item, beginning with fuzzies and working up to hoppers and then adults. As your snake gets larger, small rats are ideal.

Frequency of defecations depends on food consumption and age, but should occur at least 1-2 times per month.

HANDLING

Handling - one person per metre of snake to avoid spinal injury and disease.

HYGIENE

Newspaper is a clean and inexpensive substrate, and is safe if ingested in small amounts. Avoid substrates such as cedar, wood shavings, gravel, dirt and rocks. F10 (strength 1:500) is a reptile safe, hospital grade disinfectant and is what we recommend for your pet at home to kill bacteria, fungi and viruses. It is important to ensure that the water bowl remains clean, and spot cleaning following toileting can be done with F10, and a full clean of the enclosure should be performed monthly. Ensure when defrosting food items, that food is not left out on the bench for hours, as this can encourage bacterial growth. Defrost items in snap lock bags, rather than directly into water.

During a "full clean" remove all of the enclosure substrate and enclosure furniture and clean with hot soapy water and detergent, then rinse. Once rinsed, spray furniture with F10 disinfectant, and prior to replacing the furniture, spray and wipe the internal surfaces of the enclosure.

There are some great resources available at the Reptile Doctor online shop:

<http://www.thereptiledoctorshop.com.au/collections/books>

We recommend the book "A Guide to... Health and Disease in Reptiles and Amphibians", and advocate a general health check every 6 months as reptiles are great at hiding underlying diseases. Common diseases in pythons include intestinal parasite, skin/shedding problems, respiratory disease, oral infections, external parasites (mites), constipation, retained eggs, rectal/ colon/uterine prolapse, trauma/ thermal burns and paresis/paralysis from chronic spinal spondylosis.

To transport your python to the vet, a pillowcase or similar transported in a locking Tupperware container works well.

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