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## SHEDDING INFORMATION

Shedding, or Ecdysis, is a natural phenomenon that ball pythons undergo for a varied number of reasons. As ball pythons grow, they shed old skin that's replaced by new skin. Younger snakes shed more than older snakes because they're growing at a faster pace. It's not uncommon for your young ball python to shed at least once a month. Shedding is healthy and natural and the shed skin should come off your ball python in one piece.

Ball pythons usually defecate and urinate right after they complete the shedding process. As they start to enter the shedding phase, they will darken up and become dull looking. Their eyes will start to darken up and have a dark gray or blue colour to them. It's difficult for them to see during this stage of the shed cycle, so they can become nervous. It's best to leave them alone when they're entering their shed cycle and make sure the relative humidity in the cage is conducive to a complete and proper shed. The shedding cycle can last anywhere from 7 to 14 days on average. Although some ball pythons will eat in shed, it's not advisable to offer them food during this time as they may regurgitate the item.

After 3 to 5 days, the eyes and skin will start to clear, but will still look somewhat dull. They will often soak in their water bowl prior to shedding and will seek rough surfaces in the cage to rub against in order to help with the shedding process. You can put sterile rocks or branches in its cage during this time to help it shed. They typically crawl around their cage pressing their face against the side of the tank or against hard surfaces in order to get the shedding process started.

## INCOMPLETE SHEDS

Low humidity is just one cause of incomplete or poor shedding by ball pythons. Incomplete sheds can also be the result of less than adequate husbandry practices on the part of the keeper, parasites or bacterial infections, trauma, over-handling and malnutrition. If the cage has proper humidity and your ball python still has incomplete sheds, you might want to look at some of the reasons just mentioned as a possible cause for the incomplete sheds. There are several things you can do to help with the shedding process if you experience incomplete sheds. Soaking your ball python in lukewarm water for 15-30 minutes will help loosen up the dry skin in order to make it easy for the ball python to remove. It will often rub its body against rough areas in its cage in order to free itself of the old skin. You can help this process by lightly rubbing your fingers over the loose shed and rolling it off your ball python.

## RAISING RELATIVE HUMIDITY

There are a number of things you can do to help increase the overall relative humidity in your ball pythons' cage. You can mist the cage every other day to help increase moisture in the tank. Mulch has excellent water retention properties. You can also increase the size of the water bowl in the cage to help raise the relative humidity. Placing a heat lamp or UTH (under tank heater) over or under the location of the water bowl will help raise humidity levels in the tank as well. Another technique is to add damp sphagnum moss inside a plastic hide box to create a humidity chamber that your ball python can enter when it's nearing its shed cycle.

You should have a happy ball python that has complete sheds if you follow some of the techniques listed here.