Ball pythons are named for their habit of curling themselves up into a tight ball with their heads pulled firmly into the center when they are nervous. Ball pythons are carnivorous animals, and they are mostly active at night.

Is a ball python the right companion animal for you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>❑ 1. I can accommodate a snake that will grow to five feet or more.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❑ 2. I am comfortable handling a snake.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❑ 3. I am comfortable feeding live food to a snake.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❑ 4. I can commit to providing proper care for this snake.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❑ 5. A mature person will provide responsible and primary care for this companion animal.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you answered “Yes” to these statements, a ball python may be the right choice for you! Continue reading about how to care for a ball python and consult with a PETCO associate to learn more. PETCO is committed to responsible companion animal care.

**Average Size**

4 to 5 feet long

**Diet**

Thawed, appropriate frozen size rodents, warmed to room temperature

**Feeding**

Feed adult snakes every two weeks, or as needed; juveniles once or twice a week

Feed in a separate tank so that your snake does not associate your hand or the cage being opened with feeding

**Housing**

Size – 20-gallon tank or larger to accommodate normal behavior and exercise

Substrate – Aspen shavings, mulch-type commercial material; unbleached paper towels, soil, dampened sphagnum moss, and bark; pelleted paper; avoid gravel and artificial turf (too harsh for skin)

Habitat – Provide a hiding area just large enough for your snake to fit inside and a branch or shelf to climb on

Temperature – Temperature gradient (up to 95° F. for the warm end and 78° F. for the cool end); recommend radiant heat; use an incandescent light or ceramic heater as primary heat source, use undertank heater as secondary source

Lighting – Snakes need a photoperiod light cycle; provide 8–12 hours of light daily; do not leave white light on at all times; to view snakes at night use a black or infrared light

Water – Provide a bowl of chlorine-free water large enough for the snake to soak in

Do not house different species of reptiles together

**Life Span**

Up to 30 years with proper care

**Recommended Supplies**

- Habitat with secure lid
- Appropriate substrate
- Large water dish
- Light timer
- Book about ball pythons
- Thermometer and humidity gauge
- Hiding or retreat area
- Incandescent light or ceramic heater
- Infrared or black light
- Undertank heat source
### Normal Behavior and Interaction

Searches its habitat when hungry, appearing alert and even restless

May refuse food; can go for several weeks without feeding

Will remain quiet in the hide box or coiled up for long periods of time; should display an alert demeanor when disturbed

As snake gets ready to shed, eyes will turn a milky blue over the course of a few days and body color will start to dull and develop a whitish sheen

### Habitat Maintenance

Clean out water dish and replace water daily

Remove feces daily, or food if not eaten immediately

Thoroughly clean the tank at least once week: set snake aside in a secure habitat; scrub the tank and furnishings with a 3% bleach solution; rinse thoroughly with water, removing all smell of bleach; dry the tank and furnishings; and add clean cage carpet

### Grooming and Hygiene

Snakes will regularly shed their skin; if old pieces of skin remain after shedding, mist the snake and gently rub off the old skin

Always wash your hands before and after touching your snake or habitat contents to help prevent *Salmonella* and other infectious diseases

### Signs of a Healthy Animal

- Active and alert
- Clear eyes
- Healthy skin
- Eats regularly
- Regular shedding of skin
- Sheds skin in one complete piece

### Common Health Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health Issue (alpha)</th>
<th>Symptoms or Causes</th>
<th>Suggested Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dermatitis</td>
<td>Blisters; rapid shedding caused by an unclean habitat or one that is too cold or damp.</td>
<td>Clean the cage and lower humidity. Consult your exotic animal veterinarian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respiratory Disease</td>
<td>Labored breathing. Mucus in mouth or nostrils. Can be caused by a habitat that is too cold or damp.</td>
<td>Keep snake warm and dry. Consult your exotic animal veterinarian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomatitis</td>
<td>White, cheesy substance in the mouth; loss of teeth and appetite</td>
<td>If untreated, can be fatal. Consult your exotic animal veterinarian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ticks and Mites</td>
<td>Parasites on skin, can transmit diseases.</td>
<td>Consult your exotic animal veterinarian.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Red Flags

- Unusually frequent or infrequent shedding
- Lethargic or reluctant to eat
- Abnormal feces
- Difficulty shedding
- Vomiting
- Bumps or spots on skin
- Labored breathing
- White, cheesy substance in mouth

If you notice any of these signs, please contact your exotic animal veterinarian.

### Sources

- *Keeping and Breeding Snakes* by Chris Mattison
- *The Guide to Owning a Ball Python* by John Coborn
- *The Manual of Lizards and Snakes* by Marc Staniszewski

**Note:** The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, please refer to the above sources or contact your veterinarian as appropriate.