

Ball Python Fasting & Gram-Weight Action Checklist

A systematic approach to diagnosing feeding refusal

Phase 1: The Gram Scale & Body Condition Audit

Done bi-weekly during any feeding refusal

☐ Weigh Your Snake

Use a digital kitchen scale (in grams). Compare against your last recorded baseline.

- [< 5% loss] Safe Zone — Normal variance. Continue routine monitoring.
- [5% - 10% loss] Observation Zone — Common in winter fasts or pre-shed. Check your temperatures.
- [10% - 15% loss] Warning Zone — Prolonged refusal. Initiate the 7-day troubleshooting protocol.
- [> 15% loss] Emergency Zone — Stop troubleshooting and schedule an exotic vet visit immediately.

☐ Tactile Spine Check

Run your finger gently down the spine.

- [] Optimal Softly padded, rounded dome, barely palpable.
- [] Slim Slightly distinct spine, but full muscle mass on the sides.
- [] Emaciated (Danger) Sharp V-shaped ridge, sunken flanks, loose skin.

Phase 2: The 7-Day Troubleshooting Protocol

☐ Day 1 — Thermal Gradient Check

- ☐ Warm hide surface temperature is between **88°F - 92°F** (measured with a digital probe or temp gun, controlled by a thermostat).
- ☐ Cool zone surface is between **78°F - 80°F**.

☐ Day 2 — Humidity & HVAC Audit

- ☐ Baseline humidity reads **60% - 75%** (or **75% - 80%** if entering a shed cycle).
- ☐ Added a damp sphagnum moss hide to counter central AC/heating dryness.

☐ Day 3 — Enclosure Security Audit

- ☐ Two snug-fit, single-exit hides are in place (one on the warm side, one on the cool side).
- ☐ Three glass sides of the tank are covered to block outside movement and mimic a dark underground burrow.

☐ Day 4 — Prey Sizing Check

- ☐ Feeder's thickest point matches **1.0 to 1.25 times** your snake's mid-body girth (avoiding oversized prey).

☐ Day 5 — Environmental Noise Reduction

- ☐ Enclosure is relocated away from high-traffic hallways, loud speakers, and direct household activity.

☐ Day 6 — Prey Thermal Signature Activation

- ☐ Feeder thawed safely in cool water and warmed to a core temperature of **100°F - 105°F**.
- ☐ Used a low-noise hair dryer on the rodent's head to reach a target heat signature of **105°F - 108°F** (activating labial heat pits).

☐ Day 7 — Nighttime Presentation

- ☐ Offered food at dusk or total night in complete darkness. Left undisturbed for 30-45 minutes.

Phase 3: Veterinary Red Line Flags

If any of these apply, skip the troubleshooting and schedule a vet visit.

- ⚠ Is the refusal lasting past 3 weeks for a juvenile under 12 months old? → **Vet Check Needed**
- ⚠ Are there respiratory signs (wheezing, bubble-bubbles near nostrils, mouth rot)? → **Vet Check Needed**
- ⚠ Is there neurological twisting or a complete loss of the righting reflex? → **Vet Check Needed**

Disclaimer: This checklist is for informational and educational purposes only and does not substitute for professional veterinary advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always consult a qualified exotic reptile veterinarian for medical concerns.