What to feed a baby snake

FOUND A WILD BABY SNAKE?

1. Leave it be.
2. Treat any snake you can't identify as venomous.
3. Harmless snake indoors? Scoop it into a lidded container with a stick, never your hands, and release it outside on the same property.
4. Don't feed it or keep it. Raising a wild animal needs a permit, and many states limit collecting native snakes.
5. Hurt or caught by a cat? Put it in a ventilated box somewhere warm and quiet, skip food and water, and call a wildlife rehabilitator.

Find a wildlife rehabilitator near you: ahnow.org

Found a sick or injured snake (Tufts Wildlife Clinic): vet.tufts.edu

✓ Safe staples

- **Pinky mice (frozen-thawed)** – First food for most colubrid hatchlings
- **Fuzzy mice** – Next size up from pinkies
- **Hopper mice** – Juvenile size, about 10% of body weight
- **Adult mice** – Complete diet for adult colubrids
- **Rat pups and small rats** – Ball python staple, 10–15% of body weight
- **Earthworms (worm eaters only)** – Garter and worm-eater staple, not corn snakes
- **Fresh water** – Clean, heavy dish, changed daily

! Small amounts only

- **Eggs** – Quail eggs now and then, adults only
- **Chicks and quail** – Frozen-thawed variety for adults
- **Lizards and anoles** – Scent a pinky with it; wild ones carry parasites
- **Frogs and toads** – Hognose and garter scent; freeze wild ones first
- **Guppies and platies** – Garters only, rotated with worms and mice
- **Nightcrawlers** – Cut up, garters only, in rotation
- **Gerbils** – For picky ball pythons
- **Crickets (green snakes only)** – Rough green snakes only, gut-loaded
- **Waxworms and soft insects** – Green snake food, not for rodent eaters

✗ Never feed

- **Live mice and rats** – Bites can cause deadly infections
- **Wild-caught mice** – Parasites and disease
- **Goldfish and rosy reds** – Thiaminase destroys vitamin B1
- **Smelt and fish fillets** – Thiaminase, vitamin B1 deficiency risk
- **Chicken meat** – No bones, almost no calcium
- **Ground beef and hot dogs** – Unbalanced, no bones or organs
- **Dog or cat food** – Made for mammals; not whole prey
- **Mealworms** – Hard shells; not snake food
- **Red wigglers** – Compost worms; keepers say never
- **Bread and grains** – Snakes are strict carnivores
- **Milk and cheese** – Milk snake story is a myth
- **Fruit and vegetables** – Snakes are strict carnivores
- **Frozen or microwaved prey** – Thaw in the fridge; no microwave, no refreezing

Feeding schedule

Age	Looks like	Food	Amount	How often
0–2 weeks	Fresh from the egg or just born; eyes turn dull or bluish before the first shed	Nothing yet. It still lives on its yolk	A shallow dish of clean water only	Don't offer food until after the first shed
2 weeks–6 months	Pencil-thin hatchling; a corn snake is about 8–20 inches long	One frozen-thawed pinky mouse; ball pythons a rat pup	One prey item no wider than the widest part of the snake, about 10% of its weight	Every 5–7 days; ball pythons weekly; garters and hognoses every 4–5 days
6–12 months	Juvenile; a corn snake is about 20–35 inches and sheds often	Fuzzy mice, then hoppers; ball pythons larger rat pups	One prey item no wider than the widest part of the body	Every 7–10 days; ball pythons weekly
1–2 years	Subadult; close to adult length but slimmer	Adult mice; ball pythons small rats	One prey item, about 10% of body weight (ball pythons 10–15%)	Every 10–14 days; ball pythons every 1–2 weeks
2 years and up	Adult; corn snakes reach about 4–6 feet	Adult mice or a rat sized to the snake	One prey item, or a few smaller ones, about 10% of body weight	Every 14–21 days for corn snakes; every 1–2 weeks for most other species