FAQs: Feeding Your Reptile Frozen Mice

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frequently asked questions about FROZEN MICE

Many carnivorous herps require pre-killed, frozen mice as a part of a complete diet. If you're a first time reptile owner, knowing how to get your herp to eat them or which mice to choose can be somewhat confusing. The following information will help answer some questions you may have about frozen mice.

- Which herps eat mice?
- What are the benefits of feeding mice to my herp?
- Should I feed live or pre-killed mice to my herp?
- How do I feed a pre-killed frozen mouse to my herp?
- What do I do if my herp refuses the pre-killed mouse?
- How often should I feed my herp?
- How do I know if my herp is hungry because I'm not feeding him enough?
- What size mouse should I feed my herp?
- What is the difference between the different kinds of pre-killed, frozen mice?
- What are the nutritional values of each kind of mouse?

Which herps eat mice?

Carnivorous herps will need a diet that includes mice. This includes almost all snakes, carnivorous lizards such as tegus and monitors, and some amphibians and aquatic or semi-aquatic turtles. You will need to research your herp's dietary needs to determine whether or not he will also need to be fed mice.

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What are the benefits of feeding mice to my herp?

For carnivorous herps, a diet consisting partially or completely of mice is going to be the most natural diet that is closest to what they would eat in the wild. Commercial reptile foods are not always balanced and nutritionally complete, and there have been no long-term trials to verify that they can maintain our herps as well as mice and other prey animals can. Additionally, some commercial diets may cause certain herps to grow too quickly or too slowly and can lead to nutritional deficiencies. A true carnivorous diet is the healthiest option.

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Should I feed live or pre-killed mice to my herp?

We highly recommend that you only feed pre-killed mice to your herp. Live mice can fight back while being eaten, gnaw on your snake if left in the cage with them, or be too hard for some younger herps to catch. Attacks by live prey can disfigure herps, and they have been known to scare a herp off of his natural diet of prey animals. If the mouse fights back while your herp is eating it, it can bite through the herp's mouth area, puncture his eyes, and cut through his tongue. Feeding pre-killed mice can alleviate all of these concerns.

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How do I feed a pre-killed frozen mouse to my herp?

The first thing you need to do is defrost it. You can do this by leaving it out on the counter until it is completely defrosted or putting in a sealed plastic bag and placing the plastic bag in warm water. You should never defrost a frozen mouse in the microwave. Doing this can make the mouse so hot as to burn your reptile internally when he consumes the prey. However, it is important to make sure that the mouse is completely defrosted, as consuming a partially frozen mouse will lower your herp's body temperature.

After it is thawed, you will probably want to heat it to just slightly above room temperature. You can do this by putting it under a warming lamp or leaving it in the warm water for longer than it takes to defrost it. Having it warmer than room temperature will make it more palatable to your reptile.

Once the mouse is ready to be eaten, you can put it in a feeding dish and place the dish in the enclosure. If your reptile needs his prey to be in motion, use tongs or hemostats to dangle the prey in front of your herp.

Herps will have certain periods where they are receptive to food, so, for the best response, be sure to feed your reptile at the right time of day or night. Nocturnal reptiles will need to be fed at night, diurnal reptiles during the day, and crepuscular ones at dusk.

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What do I do if my herp refuses the pre-killed mouse?

If your herp is used to eating live prey or he just isn't sure what to do with a pre-killed mouse, there are several things you can try to encourage him to eat:

- Scent the mouse with the smell of your herp's preferred prey by rubbing a live or defrosted one on the mouse just before feeding it to your herp.
- Dangle or move the mouse around the enclosure with tongs or hemostats to trigger a feeding strike.
- Make sure that the prey you are feeding is the proper size.
- Pierce the braincase of the mouse with a pin or nail to increase its scent; this is known as "pithing."
- Dip the mouse in warm chicken broth before feeding it to your herp.
- Always wash your hands thoroughly before feeding your herp to avoid getting

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any other prey animal smells on the mouse.
- Try differently colored mice (brown, white, parti-colored) to determine which color your herp is most receptive to.
- Make sure that you are feeding your herp during his active period.

Additionally, the most important thing you can do that results in a healthy appetite is set up and maintain your herp's habitat properly. Failing to do so is one of the most common reasons that herps don't eat as they should. Temperature gradients, humidity, size, layout, accessories, and lighting can all negatively affect your herp if they are incorrect, reducing his appetite or causing him to refuse food completely. Always review your habitat setup if your herp refuses to eat.
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How often should I feed my herp?

This depends on a number of factors, including:

- Species
- Age
- What you're feeding
- Natural feeding patterns
- Time of year
- Health

In most cases, smaller herps will need to eat more often than larger ones, and younger, juvenile herps eat more frequently than older ones. Research your specific herp's needs and discuss a proper feeding schedule with your veterinarian.
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How do I know if my herp is hungry because I'm not feeding him enough?

If it seems like your herp is hungry, he probably is. Signs of hunger can include:

- Immediately becoming alert when you come near his enclosure
- Flicking his tongue when you approach (snakes and some lizards)
- Biting or striking at you when you put your hands in the enclosure if he is usually tame and calm
- Immediately devouring food

It is fairly difficult to overfeed most herps. If they are not hungry, they aren't going to eat. If it seems like your herp is always hungry, try increasing the feeding frequency or switching to a larger mouse.
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What size mouse should I feed my herp?

The size of the mouse you feed will depend on the size of your herp. Smaller herps will need smaller mice, such as pinkie mice. Larger herps can eat an adult mouse with no problem. The general rule of thumb for prey size is:

- Snakes: The prey should be no wider at its widest point than the widest part of your snake's body.
- Lizards: The prey should be no larger than 2/3 the length of the lizard's head.
- Turtles: The prey should be no larger than the turtle's head.
- Amphibians: The prey should be no larger than the amphibian's head.

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What is the difference between the different kinds of pre-killed, frozen mice?

There are four main kinds of frozen mice: pinkies, fuzzies, hoppers, and adults. The difference is as follows:

- Pinky: Young, newborn mouse with no hair and pink skin; approximately 1 to 5 days old.
- Fuzzy: Young, starting to grow hair; approximately 6 to 13 days old.
- Hopper: Juvenile, beginning to "hop" around; approximately 14 to 20 days old.
- Adult: Fully developed, possibly having reached sexual maturity, largest size; 21 days or older.

Which kind of mouse you feed your herp will depend on his size and nutritional needs. Smaller herps such as turtles and amphibians generally only eat pinky mice. Larger herps such as full-grown snakes may need adults to maintain them properly, while juvenile snakes will need smaller mice. Research your individual herp's needs at each stage of his development to determine which mouse is the best kind to feed.

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What are the nutritional values of each kind of mouse?

The following nutritional values are for San Francisco Bay Natural Frozen Mice.

- Pinky: 12% crude protein, 4.72% crude fat, 0.2% crude fiber, 80% moisture
- Fuzzy: 14% crude protein, 14% crude fat, 0.2% crude fiber, 69% moisture
- Hopper: 17% crude protein, 8% crude fat, 0.4% crude fiber, 71% moisture
- Adult: 17% crude protein, 7% crude fat, 0.3% crude fiber, 70% moisture

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