# FAQs: Lizard Shedding

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All lizards grow continuously throughout their lives. However, their skin doesn't grow to accommodate their changing size, so they must shed their skin regularly to allow for proper growth. This is called ecdysis.


- How often do lizards shed?
- How do I know my lizard is going to shed?
- How long does it take?
- What is a problem shed?
- What should I do if my lizard has a problem shed?


## How often do lizards shed?

How often a lizard sheds depends on its age. Lizards that are younger and growing faster will shed more frequently than older lizards. Some lizards, such as healthy iguanas, will shed every four to six weeks and more often during peak growing seasons. Since shedding reflects normal growth, infrequent sheddings (once or twice a year or less) should be a cause for concern.

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## How do I know my lizard is going to shed?

There are several signs of an impending shed. Lizards will show distinct behavioral and physical changes prior to shedding. They include:

- A change in overall color, most often a dulling
- Decreased appetite or complete refusal of food, especially immediately before shed
- Acting hostile when disturbed, held, or touched
- Puffing out eyes to two to three times the normal size (only occurring in lizards with moveable eyelids, this is done to loosen old skin)

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## How long does it take?

Almost all lizards shed their skin in pieces (rather than in one piece like a



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snake). After the lizard actually starts shedding, it should take no more than three weeks for all the old skin to come off. For those few lizards, such as Alligator Lizards that shed all in one piece, the shedding should be completed within several hours.

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## What is a problem shed?

A problem shed is incomplete or improper shedding, and it is known as dysecdysis. However, dysecdysis is not actually the problem. Rather, it is a symptom of the problem, and to correct it and prevent it from occurring in the future, you must find and address the actual issue. The most common cause is improper husbandry or diet. Causes of dysecdysis include:

- Improper housing, including temperature, humidity, lighting, and insufficient cage accessories for rubbing off dead skin
- Lack of moisture in the environment
- Diet that is lacking in necessary nutrients
- Too much stress
- Too much handling during shedding period
- Illness

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## What should I do if my lizard has a problem shed?

You should never ever attempt to pull or tear off loose pieces of skin that aren't coming off on their own. This can damage the partially formed keratinous scales that are growing underneath the old skin, and it can leave your lizard more susceptible to mites. If the skin doesn't come off easily when you gently pull it, do not pull it any harder.

You can do the following things to help your lizard through an incomplete or improper shed:

- Determine what problem is causing the improper shed and correct it.
- Make sure there are plenty of cage accessories for your lizard to rub against in its habitat.
- Set up a high humidity hide for small lizards.
- Place a bowl of water in the enclosure for your lizard to soak in.
- Soak large lizards in a tub of warm water (approximately 80° to 85°F) for about 10 to 15 minutes, then rub at the retained skin gently. Always monitor your lizard when it is soaking. Never leave it unattended, as it could drown.
- Wrap your lizard in a damp towel with a dry towel over it for five minutes, then expose a small area and rub gently to remove old skin.

You may have to do these things several times to get rid of all the retained skin. If your reptile isn't showing any improvement after trying the above methods, contact your veterinarian.

If your lizard is having a problem shed, pay special attention to its toes, dorsal crest spikes or fans, dewlaps, and tails. Retained skin on these areas can constrict tissue and lead to autoamputation.

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