



Living with Cockatiels

E-book on the Feathered Family: All about Cockatiels Health

© March 2004.



Table of Contents

About Cockatiels and their Health	3
Affecting Diseases and Illness	3
Pacheco's Virus	3
Polyomavirus	4
Beak and Feather Syndrome	4
Wasting Disease	5
Papilloma	5
Psittacosis	5
E-coli	5
Gout	6
Runny Nose or Nasal Discharge	6
Shelter from 10 most common injuries	7
Broken Blood Feather	7
Constricted Toe	7
Crop Burn	7
Crop Punctures	7
Dehydration	7
Stretched Crop	8
Splay Leg	8
Slipped Tendon	8
Crooked, or Scissors, Beak	9
Split Sternum	9
Dealing with Disabilities	9
When Problems Become Evident	10
The First Two Weeks	10
Resolving Residual Food Anxieties	11
Healing your Pet	11
Acknowledgements	13



About Cockatiels and their Health

After going through the detailed process of assessing various cockatiel species, and then choosing the one which really fits in for your lifestyle and your needs, you have finally brought your new pet home. Now you just want to sit back and enjoy the entertainment that comes from a cockatiel that can ‘talk’ to you, play with you, and entertain you. But is your cockatiel ‘ready’ to bond with you?



Many cockatiel maladies set in without a warning, as they are air-borne and can often be hard to control. It is advisable to seek professional advice whenever you suspect a crisis. However, there may be times when no professional medical assistance is available, which means you must take it upon yourself to identify and diagnose the problem and select remedy. This is a handy guide to help you learn about the possible causes of your cockatiel’s illness.

Affecting Diseases and Illness

Most viruses that communicate diseases to cockatiels are fatal, as shown by studies throughout avian medicinal history. Some of the common illnesses include:

Pacheco’s Virus

Set off by intranuclear, airborne microorganisms that spread easily, this proves to be fatal for many birds.



It is easy to diagnose your cockatiel if Pacheco’s Virus infects it. The bird

needs to be administered a strong oral dose of Zovirax medication.



Vaccines are easily available for this disease, but they can bring about tumors and carriers. Evidence shows that Cockatiels are likely to die shortly after inoculation.

Polyomavirus



Polyomavirus largely attacks the young ones. Though not much a great deal is known about this disease currently, vaccines are being invented that could foil the exposure of the virus to large parts of the cockatiel's body. This virus is again air-borne and complicated to control. Look for clinical warning signs like depression, delayed crop emptying, anorexia, diarrhea, regurgitation and weight loss in cockatiels.

Beak and Feather Syndrome



Some believe that PBFDS affects only Cockatoos. However, this is not correct. Spread by feather dust and dried feces, cockatiels infected with

PBFDS show abnormal growth of new feathers. The new-fanged shafts look as if swollen and gnarled. Cockatoos have beaks that are black and shiny rather than covered with feather dust. Although dust bunches are not formed in young cockatoos, the older ones usually have them. If there are no tufts, it increases the possibility of Beak and Feather Syndrome with cockatiels. Another type of PBFDS symptom that is quite prevalent is growth abnormality of the beak. Some cockatiels may have long beaks that eventually break off. At its progressive stages, this PBFDS can cause paralysis and eventual death.

Recent medical tests show positive results in diagnosing this disease even in carriers, which eventually spread to younger lots. Any cockatiel in its tender age is susceptible to such infection and is less likely to succumb. Conversely, older cockatiels seem to have natural protection and immunity to this disease. There is currently no known cure for this disease.



Wasting Disease

This is prevalent among cockatiels of all breeds. A highly contagious disease Wasting Disease is not as fast in opening out as Pacheco's. Wasting Diseases are hard to reckon since they lie dormant for years, until hosts are on a move. Studies on cockatiel show Wasting Diseases have a severe effect on nervous systems extended to all of the major organs, triggering seizures, paralysis, and tremors, and also heart attacks. There is no known medication available for Wasting Disease, but changing the food patterns of the cockatiels by including easily digestible diet supplements may prolong the life of a victim.

Papilloma

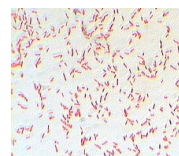
Appearing primarily in the throat or vent areas, papilloma is caused by a virus infection similar to warts. It grows large enough to block the vent, making it difficult or even

impossible for the host to defecate. Cockatiels diagnosed of Papilloma can be cured after successful laser surgery. .

Psittacosis

Psittacosis is another most dreaded bacterial infection that commonly occurs in the cockatiels and is transmitted via feather dust and dried feces. Generally, humans who are diagnosed of having Psittacosis show symptoms similar to pneumonia, which if not diagnosed or treated immediately may prove to be fatal. Among the various tests available today, there are conclusive and positive signals of these bacteria being transmitted through the carriers. Consult your avian veterinarian for details.

E-coli



This bacterium is not so lethal if it is acknowledged and treated at initial stages. In fact, when cockatiels are diagnosed of having E-coli their droppings usually have



the appearance of diarrhea, giving out strong odor.

Gout

Calcification of the kidneys among the cockatiels is common especially among the babies who are aged 4-8 weeks. In such cases, victims rarely survive.

Initially they show regurgitating and slight dehydration after feedings. In addition, babies who appear slightly smaller than their regular sizes, with protruding neck bone have the largest possibility of incurring Gout. Blood tests are also a good measure to check the high levels of urates in the blood. Overall, the cockatiels wear a tight look of a dehydrated bird with droopy eyes and reddened skin.

A severe impact can result in cockatiels having transparent skin on the crop and the veins become more visible than usual.

Runny Nose or Nasal Discharge

The most common of all nasal discharge is laxity of Vitamin-A in cockatiels. This deficiency can be corrected by increasing the food quantities that are rich in vitamins and mineral contents especially. Remember, that a proportionate value is the fundamental reason for preventing health problems in cockatiels. You can also use antibiotic nasal drops under a vet's supervision to clear the nasal passage when cockatiels have a runny nose.



Shelter from 10 most common injuries

Broken Blood Feather

The most common and painless way to fix a broken blood feather injury is to pull the feathers out. Actually, when not fully formed, a blood feather splits, and the shaft works as a straw emitting blood, which gushes out without stinting. It is very difficult to cease the bleeding, and I recommend you secure the pulled-off feather carefully with pliers, underneath the wing, and drag it straight out without causing injury to the feather follicle.



Constricted Toe

It is mostly seen among cockatiels of tender age. When contracted, due to low humidity they develop layers of rings underneath their skin, which eventually begins to contract, and gradually snaps the blood circulation of the toe. If the constrictions are not removed, it causes the toe to dry up resulting lameness in cockatiels.

Crop Burn

Indeed, a preventable injury set off by feeding hot and piping food to the cockatiels, which can burn the crop areas creating a hole at the outer layer. In case of severe crop burn, the digestive system is disrupted and will have to be sutured.

Crop Punctures

'Crop punctures' normally occur either by sloppiness or due to feeding naïveté. The only plausible approach to correct such quandaries in cockatiels is simply to suture the interior and external crop layers of the skin. Many vets prescribe antibiotics to foil the spread of infection. However, if this remains unattended, the infection will gradually settle down resulting in the baby-cockatiel starving to death.

Dehydration

When a cockatiel starts showing reddened skin that is un-elastic, it is



a sure sign to recognize that the cockatiel is suffering from dehydration. Your main concern should be to provide the bird with enough watery intakes until it is remedied.

Stretched Crop

This is a precarious situation seen commonly among cockatiels that need hand feeding. Caused when you try to feed too much food in one single feed, it overfills and stretches the crop muscles. Such situations when left unattended will slowly and gradually affect the digestive process more forcefully, causing weight loss and eventual death.

Splay Leg

Displayed in young babies, splay leg is a condition affecting birds that do not have sufficient strength to keep their footing on a slippery surface. It can often be seen in babies that are housed in containers that do not have sufficient bedding, or when the surface of the cage is too smooth for the bird to get his footing. The bird's

legs tend to spread out to sideways until he is unable to hold them under him properly. This condition needs to be remedied early on or it may become permanent as the bones harden in to adulthood.

Splay leg can be corrected by securing the bird's legs under him, but secure them at a distance that would be considered normal for him to stand. The time it takes to rectify the situation can depend on the severity of the condition as well as the bird's age. You must also remember to remedy the situation that caused the onset of splay leg otherwise it may re-occur.

Slipped Tendon

This is evident in very young babies that are still developing physically. It is where the tendon slips to the side of the heel instead of fitting into the groove of the heel. This condition makes the baby look as though he is walking on the side of his foot.

To help correct this problem, you can secure the bird's feet on a strip of



tape (as though standing him on a mouse sticky trap). When the bird gets older, the tendon could even be surgically pinned in place. And once it enlarges the groove in the heel it will retain the position without additional support.

Crooked, or Scissors, Beak

With this condition, the upper mandible is not aligned and does not close properly over the lower mandible. Although feeding technique may be one of the causes,

heredity too can be a factor. Regardless of the cause or the age of the bird, this condition is generally correctable with persistent trimming of the upper and lower mandibles and the cleft that the upper mandible rests is located on the under side of the upper mandible.

Split Sternum

This is where the skin on the breast of the bird splits near the breastbone. This injury can be sustained by a cockatiel falling from a t-stand or from the cage on to a hard surface or on to the floor.

Dealing with Disabilities

Sometimes your cockatiel may have a disability that is not immediately obvious. Loss of sight is a frequent disability among grown-ups, which requires the home keepers to arrange a whole lot of things (such as toys, seeds etc.) in the coop at reachable locations. Provide toys with texture or ones that makes noise. But do not rotate them. A little common sense goes a long way in ensuring that your cockatiel can work around his disability. For example, while working out with a sightless cockatiel, permit him to fool around on the floor, under your guardianship.



When Problems Become Evident

A major reason why you should collect maximum information on your bird from its previous owner or the breeder is because it will help you solve his behavioral problems. An owner might tell you that he is giving up his cockatiel because of the bird having a screaming problem. Anybody who has owned a cockatiel for the last 8 years or so might have had to tolerate him screeching at the top of his voice for about 6-7 or even 8 long years. So, be more realistic in your approaches and expectations about how long it will take to make your cockatiel the perfect mimic and how soon you will be able to share moments to be cherished. If your second hand cockatiel has serious problems, consult an avian behavior consultant. Since every species has its own immune system, it is not necessary that any two cockatiels of same breed will show similar reactions to the medication techniques. Habits like feather picking may have possible physical causes such as poor nutrition, allergic reactions, and environmental factors, and may not be behavioral patterns at all.

The First Two Weeks



The first two weeks after you get a cockatiel home are crucial to establish a rapport between the two of you. Although cockatiels are social birds, like all of us, they too take time to adjust to new environs. Also, if you have chosen a second-hand cockatiel, it might come to you with certain behavioral problems. And it is quite likely that his previous owner has not divulged the problems to you. Before you attempt to build a relationship with your cockatiel, assess his fear levels and evident disabilities. In case of an older cockatiel, you must remember that the experiences he has gone through in the early years of his life will have shaped his personality. It would help to check:

1. Cockatiel's apprehensions prior to medication.



2. Acquaint yourself with other physical disabilities that were left unattended at earlier instances.
3. Keep an eye on the cockatiel to mark any behavioral changes.
4. Do you spot any instances of anxiety for food and eating patterns in the cockatiels?
5. Pay attention on whether the cockatiel keeps a company or prefers to be recluse in its cage.

Resolving Residual Food Anxieties



Always pay attention to the cockatiel's behavioral patterns and try to gauge if it shows anxiety for food or similar symptoms. These symptoms consist of repetitive calling, begging and exhibiting anxiety especially when food is plentiful. It is indispensable to "regression wean" since cockatiels are inbred creatures, which favor their owner to feed them from hand or spoon. This triggers a familial bonding in addition to a sense of reassurance in the cockatiel on an intense level. Ensure that your nervous, poorly socialized cockatiel eats a healthy diet. Supplementing his diet with an essential fatty acid oil blend (you can buy it from a health food store) will not only give him a shiny, gorgeous plumage, but also boost his brain function. Sufficient EFAs in the diet are essential to help him learn new things.

Healing your Pet

Remember, just as Reiki is attuned with all curative practices, it is equally effective in healing animals as well as human beings. To tell the truth, animals accept Reiki more readily than human beings, because they do not possess mental, emotional or intellectual blocks that are typically found in human beings. . There are various alternative therapeutic measures such as: acupuncture, homeopathy, herbal and flower remedies that are quite prevalent and effective in treating your pet. Although, Acupuncture practices are relatively new for cockatiels, commonly applied acupuncture is the most effective means to deal



with arthritis, so if your cockatiel develops gout problem give it a Chinese preventive course to heal.

Homeopathy is also an effective mode to treat your pet in a domestic environment especially in cases of psychological feather plucking sessions. Since homeopathic treatments are free of side effects, many pet lovers find it a completely safer modality to heal their ailing cockatiels.

But for any domestic setup for dealing with a cockatiel that comes to blows with other birds or procures aggressive nature, 'Chinese flower treatment' is the best practice to help overcome their fear or anxieties and make them adaptable to their new situations. Colloquially referred to as 'Aromatic Bach treatment', this generally condenses lack of confidence within cockatiels and eases out similar stress problems. In addition, herbs, spices, and many food components can be used as curative modality in caring of our cockatiels. Aviculturists over the years have secretly engaged these herbal solutions to keep birds hale and healthy. Regrettably, minimal availability of adequate avian books on the herbal usage has conspicuously witnessed the art being vanquished.

Nature's time-honored antidotes prove to be of great help in curing multiple maladies and bolster immunity among cockatiels. However, for a healthy cockatiel it is essential to take proper care of their diet constituents. A healthy pet is more likely to be immune to disease and more likely to be around for a long time to make you laugh, keep you entertained and give you a moment to smile...



Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following contributors for their kind permission to use photographs of their beautiful birds in the creation of this guide:

Louise at <http://www.parrotlink.com/>

Arne at <http://www.avianbiotech.com>

Elisabeth DeSimone

<http://www.petbirdpage.com/breed.asp?breed=ynamazon> and

<http://www.petbirdpage.com/breed.asp?breed=wbcaique>

Marc Morrone at <http://www.parrotsoftheworld.com/parrots.html>