

Parakeet and Cockatiel Care Guide

Prepared by Dr. Lucy Haile on behalf of Wellesley Animal Hospital

Budgerigars (also known as budgies or parakeets) are small parrots originating from Australia. Budgies are very sociable friendly birds who, if given plenty of encouragement, can learn a large vocabulary. Cockatiels are limited talkers but males can be very good at whistling tunes. Cockatiels are also native to Australia and are one of the most popular companion birds in the US.

HOUSING

Cages

- Avoid galvanized metal cages
- Use the biggest cage possible for your bird
- Line the bottom of the cage with newspaper or paper towel.

Nighttime

- Consider covering the cage at night or having a separate night cage in a quieter area so your bird can get undisturbed sleep for 12 hours a day
- Covering the cage to decrease daylight hours can also decrease the hormonal drive for some species of birds to lay eggs

Perches

- Have a variety of different sized perches made up of different materials
- Place the perches at different heights throughout the cage

Location of cage

- Don't house your bird in or near to the kitchen due to the risk of respiratory disease caused by cooking, especially on Teflon or non-stick pans. (The toxic component is polytetrafluoroethylene [PTFE])
- Avoid candles, incense or smoking near your bird

DIET

A good quality pelleted diet should make up 70-80% of the diet for cockatiels and parakeets. The remainder should be a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables and healthy table foods. It can be difficult to encourage your parakeet or cockatiel to eat the pellets initially so please don't hesitate to talk to one of our veterinarians about making the switch from seeds to pellets.



Pellets and seeds

- Roudybush, Lafeber and Harrison's are three brands of good quality pelleted diets. If unsure of which size/type of pellet to buy discuss it with your veterinarian.
- Harrison's offer a high potency mash which can be offered over seed mixes to increase the quality of nutrition your bird is eating and to help transition your bird onto a pelleted diet.
- Lafeber offers a variety of products that incorporate seeds and pellets such as Nutri-berries, Pellet-berries, and Avi-cakes. Most small birds such as cockatiels and parakeets will readily eat these resulting in a more balanced diet than just seeds alone. These products also help with transitioning birds onto pellets.
- Avoid seed mixes as most birds will preferentially pick out their favorites resulting in an unbalanced diet
- Seeds are also higher in fats than pellets and can lack essential vitamins and minerals so it is very important to encourage your bird to eat pellets.
- We recommend using seeds as training rewards and treats as opposed to having them freely available in the cage at all times.



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Fresh produce

- Offered once to twice a day
- Aim for 5-7 different vegetables per day and limit fruits to 2-3 times a week.
- Avoid grapes, apple seeds/cores, stone fruit pips and avocado.
- Focus on feeding low sugar fruits such as berries

Healthy table foods

- Protein: small amounts of scrambled egg whites 2-3 times/week
- Steamed or roasted vegetables
- Do not feed white rice, pasta or any food containing white flour or sugar or other sweeteners.
- Avoid uncultured dairy/milk products

BEHAVIOR

Socialization

- Birds are social animals and often live in flocks or mating pairs. Budgies are very playful and enjoy the company of other budgies. If keeping more than one cockatiel be sure to provide individual attention to each bird.
- You can provide the social interaction your bird needs; however, be careful to not become a replacement for a mating partner
- Keep all physical interaction to the head and neck. Stroking further down the body can overstimulate your bird and create behavioral and physical problems.
- You should also limit time on your shoulder or lap

Training

- Your bird can be a lifelong partner and proper training will ensure your bird stays safe, has positive interactions and can decrease stress at the vets and other outings
- Teaching your bird to 'step up' or 'stay' on a perch can be very helpful in a home setting
- Keeping your bird flighted (not clipping their wings) can allow them to exhibit their natural behavior and exercise regularly; however, this can increase the risk of injury and the chance of escape
- If your bird is flighted, we recommend teaching 'recall' so your bird can have supervised exercise around the house and safely return to you
- We also recommend you keep any windows, doors, chimneys, heaters and fans closed off before allowing your bird to have supervised exercise around a room. Budgies especially are very inquisitive so make sure to prevent their access to toxic houseplants, hot stoves or pans and sources of heavy metals.
- Your veterinarian can advise you on how to teach these actions or can refer you to a behaviorist for one-on-one in-home training

Foraging

- Entertain your bird by making him forage for his food.
- Cockatiels and budgies are ground feeders, so they will often enjoy foraging opportunities offered on the bottom of the cage.
- Obtain toys that encourage foraging or create them yourself by placing food inside folded up paper or cardboard such as paper towel rolls.

Toys

- Rotate toys around the cage regularly
- Be sure to provide a variety of toys that are free of toxic metals, sharp objects or easily eaten objects.
- Provide at least one toy that encourages physical movement e.g. a ladder and one that encourages foraging

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Bathing

- Birds need regular bathing opportunities for good health
- It is best to bathe birds in the morning, so they are not going to bed wet.
- Having a small bowl of water in the aviary will allow cockatiels and budgies to bathe. Though budgies are not usually enthusiastic bathers so occasionally misting may be necessary!

HEALTH CARE

Weighing

- We recommend weighing your bird on a weekly basis. Ideally first thing in the morning to be consistent.
- We recommend purchasing a small kitchen gram scale and always weighing at the same time of day.
- Depending on your bird you may be able to teach your bird to stand/perch on the scale. If not place your bird inside a suitably sized plastic/tupperware container.
- If you notice that your bird's weight drops by 10% of its previous body weight, contact your veterinarian immediately.
- If you notice a gradual decrease in weight, contact your veterinarian to discuss causes.
- Weighing your bird becomes especially important whenever you are changing the diet or if your bird is sick. Getting your bird used to being weighed before these events will decrease the stress during an already stressful time.

Preventative Care

- New patient exams for your bird are very important. Your veterinarian can advise you on the correct nutrition, husbandry and training methods to help prevent medical and behavior problems later in life as well as doing any necessary infectious disease testing which is especially important if you have other birds at home.
- Birds by nature hide signs and symptoms of illness. Yearly examinations are therefore recommended to detect diseases early. Annual bloodwork and fecal gram stains are often recommended as part of the yearly examination.
- If you notice any change in your bird's behavior, appetite or droppings or your bird is acting 'fluffed' we would recommend contacting your veterinarian immediately