

# COCKATIELS



Companion Bird Care  
**S E R I E S**

## Common Disorders of Cockatiels

- Injuries from collisions or other pets
- Respiratory disease (sneezing, nasal discharge, clogged nostrils, open-beak breathing)
- Liver disease (abnormal feather color, swollen abdominal area)
- Gastrointestinal disease
- Heavy metal poisoning (lead or zinc)
- Obstetrical problems (egg-binding, yolk emboli)
- Feather destructive behavior
- Broken and bleeding emerging (blood) feathers
- Obesity
- Intestinal parasites

Many diseases can be prevented with regular veterinary care, proper diet and housing. For these reasons, it is important to develop a relationship with a veterinarian who is experienced in avian preventive care, medicine and surgery. For help in finding an avian veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV) by visiting [www.AAV.org](http://www.AAV.org) and click on “Find a Vet near you” or the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, [www.ABVP.com/diplomate](http://www.ABVP.com/diplomate).

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720-458-4111 [www.aav.org](http://www.aav.org)

*Cockatiels (Nymphicus hollandicus) are medium-sized, trim birds that are native to Australia. They are the most popular companion bird in the US. They adapt well to captivity and are easily bred when housed as pairs or in colonies.*

*Although color mutations are highly valued by some aviculturists, some believe the inbreeding required to produce unusual colors has actually resulted in some negative genetic disorders, including decreased disease resistance, reduced life span and hatching defects.*

*Fifteen different color mutations are recognized in aviculture, including normal gray, pied, pearl, cinnamon, whitefaced, lutino, albino, silver and yellow-cheeked cockatiels.*

# What to Expect from Your Cockatiel

Cockatiels are relatively quiet, nondestructive, entertaining birds that are easy to care for. Because they are considered so gentle, they are excellent companion birds for children. Although cockatiels may be kept in groups, many owners believe that they are better pets when kept singly. If keeping more than one,

be sure there is time for individual attention for each bird. Cockatiels are limited talkers, but some male birds are so good at whistling that their tunes are recognizable.

## Vital Statistics

Body length: 12.5 inches (32 cm)

Body weight: 75-120 g

Age of sexual maturity: 6-12 months

Average life span: 15-20 years

## Is Your Cockatiel a Male or a Female?

Immature gray cockatiels have yellow spots under the primary wing feathers and bars under the tail feathers. A male loses these bars around 9 months of age. Head and facial markings are often brighter on males. Color mutations (lutino, pied, pearl) may not show the same reliable gender differences in feather pattern.

Vocalization is the earliest means of sexing cockatiels—the male has a melodious call and may learn to imitate words and songs. Females have more of a monotonous chirp. Cockatiels are prolific year-round breeders. Their offspring are usually easy to hand-raise.

## What Should You Feed Your Cockatiel?

Unlike many parrot species, cockatiels are granivorous and adapted to a diet consisting primarily of forages such as seeds and grains. Cockatiels can thrive on a high quality, seed-based diet, although many veterinarians recommend feeding formulated diets to cockatiels. Diets can be supplemented with fresh or dried vegetables, fruits, and whole grains.

## What Do Cockatiels Do All Day?

Cockatiels are less likely to play with toys, but enjoy the company of other cockatiels. While they can be kept as single pets, single birds benefit from attention from their human flock members. Toys must be free of toxic metals, hooks and sharp objects or small, easily consumed components. Small-diameter, fresh-cut branches from nontoxic, pesticide-free trees can be provided. In the wild, cockatiels are ground feeders and often prefer foraging and exploration opportunities on the cage bottom.

## Are Cockatiels Tame?

Young, hand-raised cockatiels adapt readily to new surroundings and handling procedures. They should be exposed to novel situations (car travel, hospital visits, multiple household visitors, other pets) early in life so they are well-adjusted to these events. Gently handled and well-socialized cockatiels usually make outstanding pets.

## How to Identify Your Bird

Cockatiels occasionally escape outdoors, and permanent identification may help to return birds to their owners. One method used to permanently identify your bird is implantation of a microchip, as is performed in other pets. Some birds already have leg bands for identification. Although closed leg bands seldom cause injury, some owners prefer to have them removed.

## Should the Wings Be Clipped?

The decision to clip wings or allow free flight should be made carefully. Birds allowed free flight benefit from exercise and mental stimulation; however, free flying birds may be injured by hitting windows or ceiling fans or hurt by encountering toxic materials. With careful planning and training, some birds may be allowed free flight in a safe area. The goal of clipping the wings is not to make the bird incapable of flight but to prevent it from developing rapid and sustained flight and to prevent escape. Clipping must be done carefully and tailored to each individual to prevent flight and injuries from falling.

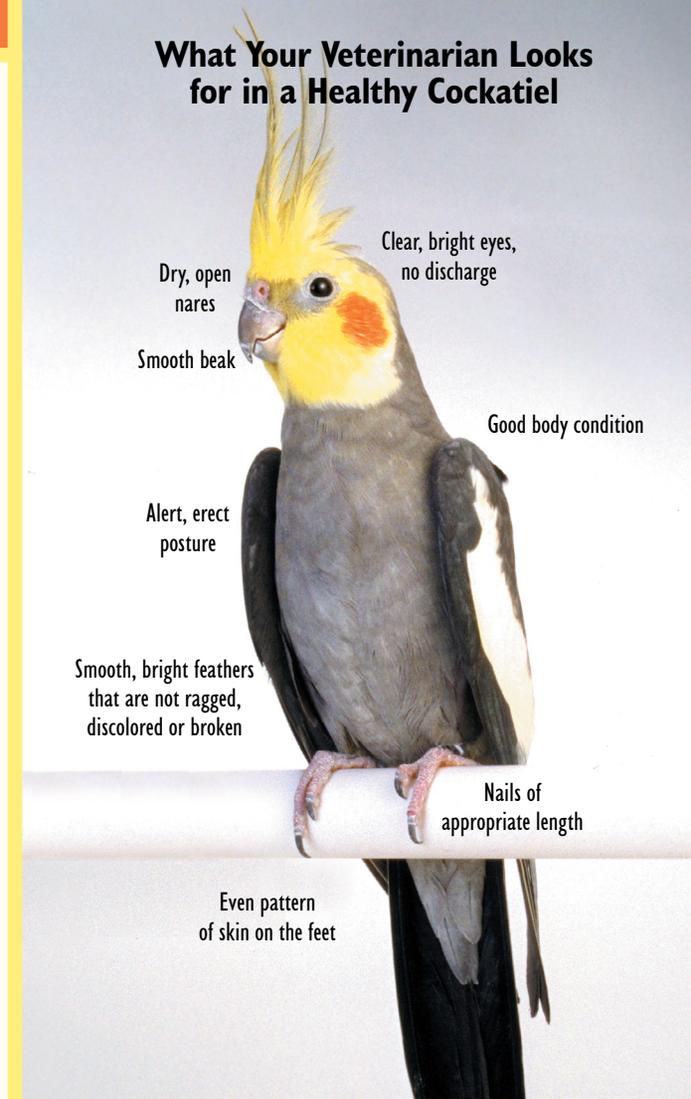
## How to Keep Your Cockatiel Healthy, Happy and Safe!

- ✓ Take your cockatiel to your veterinarian immediately after purchase, then once annually for examinations.
- ✓ Provide stimulating environmental enrichment by offering toys, social interaction, and foraging opportunities.
- ✓ Feed a high quality, seed-based or formulated diet with fresh or dried fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- ✓ Provide clean, fresh uncontaminated drinking water and change frequently. Cockatiels can be trained to use a water bottle.
- ✓ Although cockatiels are not usually prolific bathers, provide occasional opportunities for bath, shower, or misting with fresh water.
- ✓ Avoid spraying house with insecticides.

### Housing for your cockatiel should:

- ✓ be as large as possible.
- ✓ be clean, secure and safe.
- ✓ be constructed of nontoxic materials (some cages may contain heavy metals, such as zinc).
- ✓ contain variably sized perches made of clean, nontoxic pesticide-free wood or branches.
- ✓ have easy-to-clean food and water containers.
- ✓ have perches not placed directly over food or water bowls.
- ✓ offer opportunities for protected outdoor exposure to fresh air, direct sunlight and exercise.

## What Your Veterinarian Looks for in a Healthy Cockatiel



Cockatiels are very curious and will investigate anything new in their environment. That is why it is important to prevent their access to:

- ✗ ceiling fans
- ✗ stove tops with hot burners, pans or skillets
- ✗ fumes from overheated non-stick cookware
- ✗ sandpaper-covered perches
- ✗ tobacco and cigarette smoke
- ✗ chocolate, avocado, salt, alcohol

- ✗ toxic houseplants
- ✗ pesticides or chemical cleaners
- ✗ easily dismantled toys
- ✗ dogs, cats and unsupervised children
- ✗ sources of heavy metals, such as lead or zinc (stained glass windows, pewter, some mini-blinds or linoleum)
- ✗ plug-in air fresheners
- ✗ scented candles