

# 🌿 General Health Care for Parrots 🌿

## Introduction

This handout will briefly go over the typical care for the overall health of your bird. The information provided in this handout is not exhaustive and we recommend to always contact your avian veterinarian for the most current and species specific health care information.

## Trimming

We respect each individual owner's wishes for how they want to have their bird trimmed. But we will always recommend your bird's beak, nails, and wings get trimmed every 6-8 weeks approximately. Each bird's nails, wings, and nails will grow at their own rate, so your bird may need a trim more or less frequently. Manicure, or grooming, perches may help keep your bird's nails from getting sharp in between trims.

## Bathing

A weekly bath/shower is recommended for all parrot species to benefit the health of your bird's feathers, skin, and sinuses. Every bird is different and some may like showers while others like bathing in a bowl of water. A popular choice for many birds are the continuous mist sprayers. It may take several tries with different methods to discover how your bird likes to bathe. You do not need any soap to bathe your bird, just clean water will work.

## Weight

Another good way to track the health of your parrot are weekly weigh-ins. You can use a food scale that measures in grams. Once a week before your bird eats their morning meal, weigh them and track it in a journal. Significant weight loss (+/-10%) can be an early sign of illness. As a prey animal, your parrot will try and hide their illness so weighing them weekly can help you detect if they are sick before any other physical signs appear. See our [Average Weight](#) document from Dr. Scott to see what the average weight is for your species of parrot.

## Air quality

Whether you have just one bird, or several in a flock, the quality of the air for them, and you, is significantly important for everyone's health. It is highly suggested to have a high-quality air purifier near your bird's environment and have it on all the time. Birds have their own version of "dander", aka bird dust, they shed all the time. This bird dust can build up quickly and affect their human caregiver's lungs after long exposure. The air purifier will also help with the numerous airborne toxins that can cause damage to your bird's lungs. Therefore, we strongly recommend a durable, high quality air purifier to protect you and your bird.

## Molting vs. Plucking

Molting is the natural loss of old feathers that are replaced with new ones. There are typically 2 big molting “seasons” in a year where many feathers fall out, approximately 6 months apart. You can also identify molting by seeing a significant amount of pin feathers (new, unsheathed feathers) growing out. Even when your bird molts several feathers, there still won’t be any bald spots or large areas of only downy, gray feathers.

Plucking is when your bird purposely pulls out feathers that are not ready to fall out. Signs of plucking are areas of exposed skin or the exposed underlayer of gray downey feathers. Another behavior to look out for is chewing feathers, which causes small pieces of their feathers to come off. If there are signs of your bird plucking or chewing, they need to see an avian veterinarian as soon as possible to rule out any medical reasons. If your avian veterinarian rules out any medical reason for the plucking, then the next likely cause is mental or emotional stress your bird is experiencing. Parrots are highly intelligent creatures that need daily stimulation and challenges to keep up their mental health. Once a bird starts plucking or chewing because of mental health reasons, it is very difficult for them to stop. There are strategies you can try to minimize their plucking/chewing like trying CBD oil or wearing a fleece cone they can chew instead.

Non-medical reasons for plucking/chewing can be:

- Not enough toys in and outside their cage
- Not enough positive social interactions in and outside their cage
- Need more challenging methods to forage for their food
- Neglect and/or abuse
- Traumatic experience
- Need more time outside their cage

## Early Signs of Illness

The following signs indicate the need for a visit to an avian veterinarian:

- Redness, swelling or loss of feathers around eyes
- Crusty material in or around nares
- Stained feathers over nares (nostrils) or around the face or vent
- Flakiness on skin or beak
- Overgrowth of beak or nails
- Changes in vocalization, eating habits, or aggression
- Broken, bent, picked, or chewed feathers
- Unusual or dull feather color
- Prolonged molt
- Lameness or shifting of body weight
- Sores on bottom of feet

## Signs of Serious Illness

The following signs can indicate a serious health problem and veterinary assistance should be sought at once:

- Blood loss or injury
- Discharge from nares (nostrils), eyes, or mouth
- Labored breathing or abnormal respiratory sounds
- Decreased or excessive food or water consumption
- Loss of weight or general body condition
- Enlargement or swelling on the body
- Vomiting or regurgitation
- Significant reduction in the quantity and frequency of droppings, or a pronounced change in their odor or consistency
- Decreased vocalization and interest in social interaction
- Fluffed posture and sleeping more than normal
- Seizures or other neurologic abnormalities
- Inability to perch

## Emergency plan/care

If your bird becomes seriously ill or injured, there are things you can do to help until they see an avian veterinarian as soon as possible:

- Keep them in a warm, quiet place (80-85 degrees Fahrenheit)
  - Cover their cage and place a heating pad underneath their cage to create a temporary incubator
- Minimize handling
- Provide easy access to food and water (unless bird is vomiting)
  - Electrolyte solution, such as warmed sports or pediatric electrolyte drinks can be offered drop by drop with a syringe or eye dropper
  - Don't attempt to drop food or liquids into a bird's mouth if it is too weak to swallow.
- Apply cornstarch to a bleeding toe or bloodfeather
- Don't give any drugs or remedies that were not specifically prescribed for your bird.
- Don't wait to see how the bird is tomorrow.
- Don't wait to call your avian veterinarian!