

## Care of the Sick Bird

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Birds tend to conceal their illness until they are in a serious condition. At the earliest onset of illness, veterinary assistance should be sought so the appropriate treatment can be initiated without delay. There are a number of supportive measures that can be taken immediately for the sick bird and also are applicable for the convalescent bird.

### Temperature

Increase the environmental temperature to 85 –90 degrees F. Use a small electric floor heater in a closed room, heating pad beneath the cage, or a heat lamp. Place the heating pad under only a portion of the cage. This enables the bird to move to a cooler area if desired.

A red infrared heat lamp can be purchased at most hardware stores. This type of bulb supplies heat but not intense light. A red infrared bulb can be kept on all night and will not disturb the bird sleeping. Be careful to keep the bulb far enough away from flammable objects. A thermometer must be used to check the temperature. It is very difficult to guess the temperature. If a bird is too warm, his feathers will be slicked down and his wings will be held slightly away from the body, and he may breath faster. If chilled, the bird will fluff up his feathers.

### Cage Set Up

The cage should be cleaned well. Remove any grit or gravel flooring. Sick birds often have depraved appetites and may overeat grit, which can be fatal. Grit is not needed and should not be offered. Move perches close to the food and water bowls if the bird is perching. If the bird cannot perch and is sitting on the bottom of the cage, move food and water bowls to the bottom of the cage, and cover the floor with a comfortable material such as paper towels or bath towels. Change towels daily. If looped terry cloth towels are used, make sure the birds nails are not too long and become caught on the loops; if so, use smooth towels. Remove any sandpaper-covered perches. They do not keep the nails trim as advertised and never are recommended for use.

The bird should be isolated in a separate cage from other birds so that bowel movements and appetite can be monitored. A parakeet, for example, will normally have 20-40 droppings in a 24-hour period; this can be a measure of appetite. Isolation also will check the spread of infection in others if a contagious illness is present. Place the cage in a quiet part of the house.

Cover  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the cage with towels to help keep the cage warm and offer seclusion for the bird. Keep part of the cage shaded from the heat/light source in case it is too hot. Ill or convalescent birds require 12-hours of sleep in a darkened, quiet room. During the daytime 12 hours, plenty of light should be provided to encourage eating.

### Nutrition

Most sick birds suffer from some degree of nutritional deficit and they are usually eating less than required. A good balanced diet and fresh water should be provided at all times. Birds should be weighed daily on a gram scale or baby scale if possible. Birds can loose weight rapidly. If diarrhea occurs, decrease the feeding of fruits and vegetables. Cooked rice is helpful to clear up diarrhea. Various methods can be employed to encourage appetite:

- Serving warm foods including corn, baby foods, oatmeal, diced hard-boiled eggs, etc.
- Serving warm seeds which have been soaked in hot water for a short period followed by straining.

- Sweetening drinking water with honey or sugar.
- Having food and water within easy reach for bird.
- Eating your meals with the bird to encourage eating. (Do not feed food you have bitten or chewed).
- Hand or spoon-feeding bird.

### **Tube Feeding**

If the bird is eating little or not at all, tube feeding is necessary. Preferably, veterinary staff should perform this. If the owner wishes to tube feed their bird at home, it should only be attempted after thorough training by veterinary staff. Three formulas are:

1. **Exact** baby bird formula. A powder mixed with hot water. Available at All Creatures Care Cottage and most pet supply stores. Fast and easy to use.
2. Mix: 2 oz. Of Soylac or NeoMulsoy, 1 T Tiger's Milk, 1 T Honey, 4 T Raw Peanut Butter, ¼ tsp. Vionate Vitamin mix, 1 cooked egg.
3. Gerber's banana and tapioca 50% and Gerber's High Protein Baby food (powdered variety) 50%. Add enough water or Soylac in blender to produce a thin milkshake-like consistency. Medications can be added to tube feeding mix. Feed warm food, not cold.

Tube feeding amounts:

Finch: 0.1 - 0.5 ml	Lovebird or Parrotlet: 1-10 ml
Canary: 0.1-0.25 ml	Amazon Parrot/African Grey: 10-15 ml
Parakeet: 1.0 ml	Macaw: 20 ml
Cockatiel: 2-4 ml	

Record volume and frequency of feeding. Vary amount depending on weight loss or gain, or regurgitation. Tube feeding can be given one to four times daily depending on how much the bird will benefit from it and how well it accepts the procedure. Above all, do not overstress the bird.

### **Weighing**

Ill birds should be weighed on a gram scale daily. A loss of a few grams can be very significant, indicating a decreased appetite and or dehydration. The following are approximate normal weights:

Zebra Finch: 10 – 16 grams	Mynah: 160 – 350 grams
Canary: 12 – 29 grams	Pigeon: 260 – 350 grams
Parakeet: 30 grams	African Grey: 300 – 380 grams
Lovebird: 50 – 70 grams	Amazon: 325 – 450 grams
Cockatiel: 75 – 85 grams	Cockatoo: 500 grams
Conure: 84 – 96 grams	Macaw: 800 – 1700 grams

### **Respiratory and Sneezing Problems:**

Needs to be seen by a veterinarian.

### **Additional Instructions:**