

Avian Health Care Recommendations
by Dr. Greg Burkett
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1. Have a complete work up performed on your bird every year. This annual exam should include a physical exam, complete blood count (CBC), microbiological culture or gram stain of the cloaca, and vaccinations.
2. Some species of birds need additional testing: a. All cockatoos and lovebirds should be tested once for Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (PBFD); all birds thought to have been exposed to PBFD should also be tested. b. All amazons, budgies, rose-breasted cockatoos, and macaws need to have cholesterol levels checked annually. Cholesterol should be monitored in all birds on a high fat diet (like seeds). c. All South American species need to have an examination performed every six months to look for signs of papillomatosis. d. All birds should have a full chemistry panel and survey radiographs on file before the age of 5 years. Having normal values on file will allow for easier health monitoring as your bird ages and early detection of disease and other problems.
3. All birds, whether individual pet or breeder, need to be vaccinated annually against Avian Polyomavirus.
4. Learn to recognize a sick bird. Birds are very adept at hiding their signs of illness. Most commonly the first signs go unnoticed. Usually the first signs include changes in behavior, e.g. decreased activity level or decreased vocalization. If you recognize that your bird is sick, it is an emergency situation. Immediately put a heating pad on your bird's cage and call your avian veterinarian. Other signs of illness include: a. Decreased appetite - Remember that birds will pretend that they are eating, so don't be fooled. b. Diarrhea or persistent abnormal droppings c. Too much fluid in the droppings (polyuria) d. Fluffed e. Sitting on the cage bottom f. Coughing, sneezing, abnormal breathing sounds g. Tail bobbing h. Weight loss i. Regurgitating, vomiting j. Change in water intake k. Weakness, Ataxia l. Abnormal behaviors or vocalizations
5. Do not use Over-the-Counter (OTC) medications in your bird's water as treatment for illness. These medications are ineffective against avian pathogens and will only mask disease symptoms. Birds can become worse with OTC medications and veterinarians have a more difficult time diagnosing the disease properly.

Dr. Greg Burkett Author: A graduate of North Carolina State with a BS degree in biology. He went on to earn his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from North Carolina State. He went on with post DVM training specializing in avian medicine. He sat and passed this examination by the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners in Avian Practice earning Diplomate status in November, 2002. Fewer than 100 veterinarians can claim that status.