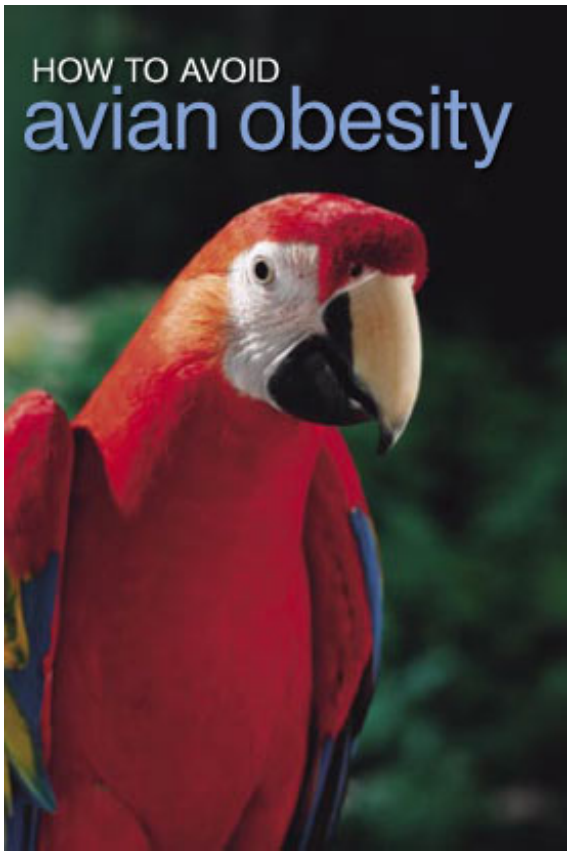
Avian Obesity: Dietary Tips for Prevention

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Do you have a pudgy budgie, a corpulent cockatiel, or a portly parrot? No matter what type of feathered companion you have, if you are not careful about his diet and activity level, he can suffer from obesity, the most common nutritional problem in pet birds. Fortunately, it is also one of the easiest health problems to solve.

avian obesity, as with any animal, is caused by too much energy in (calories) and too little energy out (exercise) over an extended period of time. Overweight birds are not only uncomfortable; they are also at risk for serious health problems such as hepatic lipidosis (fatty liver disease), lipomas (fat tumors), and xanthomas (small raised nodules of fat – birds will pick at them). Obesity can also lead to exercise intolerance, difficulty in breathing, and a shorter life span for your treasured companion.

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is your bird at risk?

Budgies, Amazons, cockatiels, and cockatoos are especially prone to obesity. It is believed to be because these birds are very active in the wild, but in captivity are usually sedentary and have unlimited access to food. Given the right circumstances, however, any bird can become obese.

causes of obesity

Wondering why your bird is overweight? Bottom line is he is taking in more calories than he is expending. Inappropriate diet is one cause – such as diets with too many nuts or seeds. Other causes include too much high fat "people food," too few fresh vegetables and fruits, and too many sweets and treats. Other contributors are boredom and lack of exercise. Even if you are feeding a high quality pelleted diet, some birds may overeat out of boredom and become obese.

easy solutions

Take steps right way to get your bird in better shape. Work with your avian veterinarian to formulate a lifestyle plan that includes a healthy diet, plenty of water, healthy, low-calorie treats, and more activity. To give him more activity, provide a larger cage, so he can move around more; use foraging toys so he has to work to get his food; and give him plenty of opportunities to exercise. Offer interactive cage toys so he'll expend energy piquing his natural curiosity. Give him supervised time outside the cage. Let him perch on your arm and move your arm up and down so he exercises his wings. See our exercise article for other creative ways to exercise your bird. Keep your bird in tip-top condition, and he will be happier and healthier. This not only can prolong his life span, it can also improve your relationship with your bird.

Is your bird in good condition?

Determine your bird's body condition:

- Ask your avian veterinarian to assess your bird's body condition and give you an ideal weight for your bird. Then, weigh your bird with a quality scale on a regular basis. Even a few grams in a small bird can be the difference between good body condition and obesity.
- Learn how to "feel for the keel" (the "breast" bone): it should neither be too prominent nor difficult to feel.
- Look at the way your bird's feathers appear on his body. Deposits of fat under his skin may cause his feathers to appear uneven or as if he has bald spots.
- Observe his stance on the perch. Does he stand normally, or are his legs spread apart farther than a normal bird?
- Check out his abdomen. Is it soft or distended? This may be caused by fat deposits.

WE RECOMMEND

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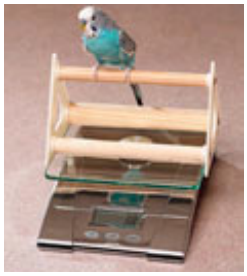

Digital Scale lets you monitor your bird's weight on a regular basis.

Model F030 Flight Cage can be used as a flight cage for smaller birds for at-home exercise.

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