Fatty Liver Disease in Pet Birds

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

fatty liver
(Hepatic Lipidosis)

Fatty liver disease (*hepatic lipidosis*) is a disease in which large amounts of fat are deposited in the liver. It is most common in budgies, cockatiels, Amazon parrots, Quaker parrots, lovebirds, and cockatoos. It is a very serious condition, and death may occur if treatment is not started early in the course of the disease.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS?

Birds with fatty liver disease generally have a sudden loss of appetite, are lethargic, and depressed. Many are overweight and the liver is enlarged due to the additional storage of fat. This results in a distended abdomen and difficulty breathing. They may have diarrhea and abnormal droppings (green in color). Birds may have poor feather quality. If the liver function is greatly decreased, birds may develop central nervous system signs such as seizures, loss of balance, and muscle tremors. Budgies may have overgrown, soft beaks. Some birds with fatty liver disease may develop few signs before they die suddenly.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT?

Birds with fatty liver disease must be placed on a low-fat diet, which includes high quality pellets and fresh fruits and vegetables. It is sometimes difficult to get them to eat, so tube feeding may be necessary during the beginning of the treatment. They usually need additional supportive care such as supplemental heat and fluids. Additional medications, such as lactulose, may be given to treat or prevent central nervous system signs.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT IT?

Help reduce the risk of fatty liver disease by keeping your bird at a healthy weight. The following steps can help:

Prevention starts with a healthy diet, and that means a pelleted diet, like ZuPreem AvianMaintenance FruitBlend. Or, if your bird is already heading toward the heavy side, use low-fat pellets, like Roudybush Low-Fat Diets, to bring her back down to a healthy weight. It's also essential to add fresh vegetables to your bird's diet. Fruits and treats should make up 10% or less of the diet.

Provide plenty of water. Clear waterers like Smart Crocks make it easy to view water levels, so you can closely monitor your bird's water intake and make sure she's getting enough.

Choose healthy, low-calorie treats instead of human treats or snacks that are higher in fat and calories.

Provide plenty of outlets for exercise and activity. Birds become overweight when they consume more calories than they expend, so it's important to keep them active to expend more energy. Also, some birds overeat out of boredom and become obese. Providing fun outlets for activity can keep your bird entertained.

what causes it?

High fat content in diet (all-seed diet)

Too frequent feedings, or eating too much at each feeding

Nutritional deficiencies such as biotin, methionine, and choline

Thyroid disease

Toxins such as lead, arsenic, carbon tetrachloride, chloroform, phosphorous, aflatoxins, and ethionine

Hereditary factors

Diabetes mellitus

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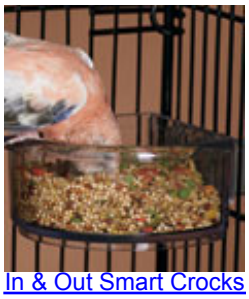
Roudybush Low Fat Daily Maintenance Diet



In & Out Smart Crocks

- Avian Obesity: Dietary Tips for Prevention
- Bird Nutrition: Avoid Pitfalls That Harm Your Bird
- Quality Diet Equals Quality Life

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