Gout in Birds: How to Recognize the Signs in Your Bird

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

gout in birds

Gout is a common disease among humans and reptiles, and is also seen in birds, especially budgies, waterfowl, and poultry. Although some instances of gout are hereditary, others may be aggravated by environmental or nutritional factors. In either case, proper nutrition is thought to play a role in gout management. Understanding the reasons for gout and recognizing the signs are essential - especially for budgie owners - so you can get your bird treatment when he needs it.

What is Gout?

Gout can occur if the level of uric acid (a by-product of the breakdown of dietary proteins usually excreted in the urine) in the blood exceeds the ability of the kidneys to remove it. In articular or synovial gout, the uric acid crystallizes in the joints, ligaments, and tendon sheaths.

In visceral gout, uric acid deposits are found in the liver, spleen, pericardial sac (the covering of the heart), kidneys, and air sacs.

Gout can be primary, when the high uric acid level is caused by an abnormal breakdown of protein, or secondary, in which case the kidneys aren't able to adequately excrete uric acid. Secondary gout can be caused by medications, chronic diseases, kidney disease, overeating, improper diet (high protein, and possibly high Vitamin D or low Vitamin A), dehydration, some infections, and other environmental factors that affect the kidneys' ability to eliminate uric acid.

Signs of Gout

If your bird has articular gout, his joints may be enlarged, stiff, and painful, and he may continually shift weight from one foot to the other and have a shuffling gait. The bird may be unable to perch, spending most of his time on the floor of the cage. If the wings are affected, the bird may be unable to fly. If internal organs are involved, other signs include:

- Decreased appetite
- Lethargy
- Weight loss
- Abnormal droppings
- Change in temperament

Diagnosis

A diagnosis of gout involves analyzing the diet, environmental factors, availability of fresh, clean water, and a thorough history of previous health problems and treatments. An avian veterinarian suspecting gout will usually take x-rays and blood tests, and may also analyze the joint fluid or perform a biopsy. Uric acid crystals found in joint fluid or tissues will confirm the diagnosis.

Treatment

If your veterinarian determines that your bird has gout, treatment will depend on whether there's an underlying dietary or environmental cause. If so, this must be remedied. Also, if the cause of the gout is due to improper nutrition, your veterinarian will put your bird on a low protein diet and may supplement with Vitamin A. If your bird is dehydrated, your veterinarian may want to administer fluids. Your avian practitioner may also prescribe a medication such as allopurinol, which decreases the amount of uric acid produced in the body.

Most birds with gout must be treated for the rest of their lives. If therapy is discontinued, there is a possibility that the painful

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

signs may reappear. Although there is no cure for gout, it's important for every bird owner to keep an eye out for symptoms, while also providing proper nutrition; an adequate source of Vitamin A, either from leafy, green vegetables, or vitamin supplements; and fresh, clean water.

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*