

Avian Obesity: Dietary Tips for Prevention

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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 her diet and activity level, she 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 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.

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? The bottom line is that she is taking in more calories than she is expending. Inappropriate diet is one cause – a diet with too many nuts or seeds, for instance. 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 her more activity, provide a larger cage, so she can move around more; use [foraging toys](#) so she has to work to get her food; and give her plenty of opportunities to exercise. Offer interactive cage toys so she'll expend energy piquing her natural curiosity. Give her supervised time outside the cage. Let her perch on your arm and move your arm up and down so she exercises her wings.

See our [exercise article](#) for other creative ways to exercise your bird.

Keep your bird in tip-top condition, and she will be happier and healthier. This not only can prolong her 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 her body. Deposits of fat under her skin may cause her feathers to appear uneven or as if she has bald spots.
- Observe her stance on the perch. Does she stand normally, or are her legs spread apart farther than a normal bird?
- Check out her abdomen. Is it soft or distended? This may be caused by fat deposits.