

# Root Causes of Feather Picking in Birds

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## what makes a **bird pick?**

ew things are as disconcerting to bird owners as large featherless areas on their bird. Feather picking is a disturbing disorder that often gets attributed to boredom, but there are also many other causes. Oftentimes, both medical and behavioral components are at work when a bird picks. In order to take the proper corrective action, you must first work with your veterinarian to determine the cause, or causes.

### **health concerns**

Many medical problems contribute to feather picking. Malnourishment, such as deficiencies in protein, essential fatty acids, or vitamins and minerals, can lead to unhealthy skin and feathers, which can lead to picking. Exposure to toxins or allergens – airborne, ingested, or by direct contact, are also suspect. These include cigarette smoke, dander from other birds in your home, foods, and even certain metals. Some bird toy chains, locks, and even cages (or the paint used on them) can contain zinc or lead. Ingestion of these metals can result in toxicities leading to picking.

Feather picking can also be an attention-seeking behavior, particularly in homes where the owner makes little time to meet the emotional/social needs of the bird or seldom rewards the bird. Poor environment causes picking, too, and includes situations where the bird is confined in a cage that is too small, where the bird has a lack of toys or means to forage, or even a sleep environment that is too noisy or bright.

Birds also can resort to feather picking when they experience fear or major household changes. Examples are




Diseases of the internal organs, such as kidney disease, Chlamydiosis, and fatty liver disease, can also contribute to feather picking. So can intestinal parasites, such as roundworms. Skin parasites or bacterial or fungal infections of the skin may result in picking. Thyroid disorders may play a role. Some birds pick as part of reproductive behavior or if they have pain. If your bird is a serious feather picker, it may not be easy to put a finger on the cause. You will need your avian veterinarian to perform a thorough exam and testing, which may include blood count, thyroid screening, fecal exam, cytology, and more.

### **behavioral concerns**

When medical conditions are ruled out, we next look to psychological or environmental causes of feather picking. Birds, like many other pets, can experience separation anxiety. When this is the case, a bird will often pick only when the owner is not present, and it may take the owner a while to figure out his bird has a problem.

introduction of a new bird, owners' divorce, a new home, teasing, or a hostile family member. When picking is witnessed at an early age, poor early socialization may be the cause. Even low humidity in the home can contribute.

Birds are very complex and fragile creatures. As owners, it is our job to become aware of factors that cause picking and to carefully observe our bird so that we can work with our veterinarian to implement the proper course of treatment. A healthy, happy bird requires much from the owner, especially help overcoming this damaging behavior. And, like many habitual behaviors, change will not occur overnight. Treatment can take weeks, and may even require prescription medication along with social, environmental, and behavioral adjustments.

<b>Feather Picking</b> Practical Prevention for Non-Medical Causes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Encourage independent play with <a href="#">foraging toys</a> to occupy your bird's time and give him a challenge that keeps him from resorting to excessive preening or picking</li><li>Remove feared objects from your bird's environment</li><li>Feed a high-quality, nutritionally complete <a href="#">pelleted diet</a> supplemented with fresh vegetables and a few fruits to prevent malnutrition; if your bird is on a seed-only diet, begin dietary changes to include less seed</li></ul>	

Ban cigarette smoke from your home and make your bird's environment safe from other toxins

Keep your bird's environment clean; get in the practice of frequently [cleaning his cage](#) and accessories to minimize allergens

Keep your bird's skin hydrated with proper indoor humidity or frequent [bathing or misting](#)

Spend time with your bird each day, so he will not have to resort to attention-seeking behaviors; if he plucks for attention – leave the room during the behavior, then come back to your bird and offer a reward when the behavior stops

If your bird suffers separation anxiety, give your bird some playtime, exercise or a bath just before you leave, and place in his cage a special [toy](#) he normally does not have access to

Improve your bird's surroundings: increase his [cage](#) size, swap out his [toys](#) frequently, give him plenty of foraging opportunities, let him play on a [playstand](#) in different rooms of your home, decorate his cage, introduce him to various people, and train each family member to handle him

"Birds are very complex creatures. A healthy, happy bird requires help overcoming this damaging behavior."



## WE RECOMMEND



[Sunshine Factor](#) Daily Bird Supplement boasts natural health benefits from oil extracted from the fruit of the red palm tree.



[Flight Cages](#) offer spacious interiors.



A variety of [toys](#) are a boon to your bird's social and physical well-being.