

Injury Prevention and Emergency Care

Preventing Injuries and Emergencies

Owners can take many steps to prevent injuries, or at least to be prepared when an emergency happens, especially if it's after normal veterinary hours.

1. Find and establish a relationship with a qualified avian veterinarian for regular wellness checks, before you might need emergency care. The wellness check will allow your veterinarian to look for signs of hidden illness, and go over an illness prevention plan for your bird, which will include information on ideal diet, housing, and medical tests that might be beneficial.
2. Keep the number for emergency after-hours care posted where you and family members can easily find it. Remember, not all 24-hour emergency clinics will see birds or other exotic pets as patients. Find out from your avian veterinarian whom to call after hours.
3. "Bird-proof" your bird's cage, and any area of the home where the bird spends time. Common sources of injury in the cage include inappropriately sized cage bars, older cages made with toxic materials such as zinc, poorly constructed toys, or toys that are too flimsy for the size of the bird, and toys or other objects with loose strings that might become entangled around the wings or legs.

Dangers outside the cage include ceiling fans (for birds that can fly), mirrors and windows, stove or other hot surfaces or substances, some houseplants, other pets or animals and small children. Hidden sources of toxins include stained glass, pewter, linoleum, batteries and many others. If you are not sure, or it's not something specifically designed for birds, don't let your bird have access to it.

4. Even after "bird-proofing," supervise all birds outside the cage at all times. It only takes a second for a clever bird to discover something dangerous that might be hidden or missed.
5. Birds greatly benefit from time outdoors in direct sunlight. Ideally, pet birds outdoors are supervised at all times. For birds that might spend time unsupervised in outdoor aviaries, be sure there is a retreat from direct sunlight, heavy winds and rain. Check to be sure cage doors and windows cannot be opened by the bird, predators or even uninvited neighbors. Be sure other animals are not able to climb to the top of the cage and defecate, as some feces can contain dangerous parasites.
6. Never house birds overnight outdoors. Predators, especially raccoons are very good at opening even what appear to be adequately secured cage doors and grabbing birds from the outside

Emergency First Aid for Birds

Some first aid techniques can be useful while waiting for emergency help:

Bleeding from broken toenails, beak tips or feathers

Apply direct, firm pressure using cotton or gauze soaked in cold water over the source, and hold in place for 2-3 minutes. Commercial quick stop products, flour or even a bar of soap held onto the tip of a bleeding nail may help as well. Very mild bleeding may be stopped this way. If the bird is still bright, alert and active, it can be watched carefully over the next few hours. However, if bleeding continues or returns, or the bird appears quiet or tired, get help from an experienced avian veterinarian. Once bleeding from a broken feather is halted, prevent the bird from flapping its wings or from vigorous activity, or bleeding is likely to start again. Birds may need to be held gently in a towel for transportation to the veterinarian.

Most avian veterinarians do not recommend placing a tourniquet or attempting to pull out a broken feather, since this may cause additional stress to a weakened, anxious bird. Bleeding feathers can be pinched closed to stop bleeding. While the broken feather should not be pulled out, a broken/hanging fragment may be carefully removed with scissors.

Recognizing Signs of Injury or Illness

Some signs of injury or illness are obvious, such as bleeding, inability to stand, prolapse from the vent or seizures. However, any unusual sign or change in behavior warrants a call to a qualified avian veterinarian.

See the companion brochure "When Should I Take My Bird to the Veterinarian" for more details.

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The weak bird

Most injured or sick birds benefit from gentle heat (80-85 degrees) and quiet while waiting for the veterinary visit. Use a pet carrier, a plastic container or even a shoebox to provide a quiet, semi-dark environment. Use a heating pad on low with several layers of towel between the pad and the container, a commercial hand warmer (prevent the bird from chewing on it) or even a microwaved baked potato as a heat source. If the bird seems distressed or starts breathing rapidly after providing heat, remove the heat source at once. If it is going to be a while before the veterinarian can see the bird, and the bird is alert and swallowing, consider offering drops of water sweetened with syrup or honey, one small drop at a time, with a small syringe or an eye dropper. Do not feed a bird that is too weak to swallow.

For More Information

For more information on birds, ask your veterinarian for copies of the following AAV Client Education Brochures:

- Basic Care
- Behavior: Normal and Abnormal
- Avian Chlamydiosis & Psittacosis
- Feather Loss
- Feeding
- Health Exam
- Injury Prevention and Emergency Care
- Signs of Illness
- When Should I Take My Bird to a Vet?

Looking for an Avian Veterinarian Near You?

For help finding a qualified avian veterinarian in your area, go to www.aav.org and click "Find a Vet."

Online Resources



Follow AAV on Facebook (www.facebook.com/aavonline) for great tips and the latest news for pet bird owners. You can also find us on Twitter (@aavonline) and YouTube!

Our website, www.aav.org, offers a Find-a-Vet tool to help pet bird owners locate avian veterinarians around the world. We also offer a variety of resources such as basic bird care instructions and more. Visit the website today!

AAV offers bird clubs a monthly news bulletin for use in their newsletters. Clubs may contact the Publications Office (pubs@aav.org) for information.