

Cockatiel Foot Problems

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I have an 18-year-old male cockatiel that sits in one place most of the day until I get home. Now he has sore, red feet. The vet said I should get "natural" as well as different diameter perches. Will this help? What should I do in the meantime? I hold him over a warm dish of water for five minutes (all he will stay), and then I put olive oil (that the bird store told me to use) on his feet. But I am afraid he will get too oily. Do you have any suggestions? He is now limping, and he is so sore. I am very upset over this. Any advice will be appreciated.

The foot problems your cockatiel is experiencing are not something that would have happened overnight, and it is possible that there is more than one factor contributing to his problem. You did not mention if a vet saw your cockatiel or if you called the vet office and were given advice over the phone.

The first order of business is to get your bird to a qualified veterinarian for an examination and treatment immediately. If possible, take your bird's cage to the vet with you. This will give the vet the opportunity to see the environment that the bird is housed in. The vet will be able to give you suggestions from what is observed and not just from your explanation of the cage and set up. It is advisable to take a sample of the food you are providing your cockatiel. Unless directed differently by the vet, stop all treatment until you have been properly advised.

As advised by your vet, change the current perches with natural perches in different diameters. When collecting branches, make sure they have not been sprayed with pesticides or chemicals and are free from rot and mold. Sizes should vary so that the feet grasp almost completely around in the smallest area and just about flattened when standing on the largest area. Perching that is not cylindrical and more irregular in shape will decrease the pressure placed on any one part of the foot. Keep perches clean. Fouled perches can aggravate the already existing foot problem. Perches should be replaced when fouled with feces, chewed or worn.

Do not locate perches above each other or above food and water containers. This would also include overlapping perches in cage corners or any other place feces would be dropped from an upper perch to the perch or dish below. Sandpaper perch covers should never be used in the cage. They do not have an effect on the length of the bird's nails and may predispose a bird to foot problems.

Nutritional deficiency can be a factor in the foot problems experienced by your cockatiel. The most common vitamin deficiency seen in pet birds is insufficient vitamin A. Vitamin A deficiency often produces hardening or callousing of the epithelial tissues and roughness and scaling of the legs and feet. Good sources for providing vitamin A are yellow, orange and dark green leafy vegetables. Sweet potatoes, yams, carrots, squash, alfalfa sprouts, endive, kale, spinach and dandelion greens all contain vitamin A. It should be noted that long-term vitamin A deficiency can result in renal disease. It is also possible for a bird to overdose on vitamin A. Never add any vitamins to the diet of a bird on a pelleted diet, unless directed and supervised by a veterinarian.