

## Top 10 Pet Cockatiel Vet Questions & Answers

**Have a vet question about your pet cockatiel? Check out the BirdChannel.com top 10 cockatiel vet answers.**

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Cockatiels are strong fliers. Talk to your avian veterinarian to discuss the pros and cons of trimming your pet cockatiel's wing feathers.

### Top 10 Pet Cockatiel Vet Questions #6

How do I tell if my female pet cockatiel is about to lay an egg?

A female cockatiel might lay eggs even when caged without a male pet cockatiel. Several signs show whether a female cockatiel is becoming reproductively active. First, a sudden weight gain of 5 to 10 grams is often a clear sign that a hen is preparing to lay an egg. Weigh your pet bird on a weekly basis to tell whether it rapidly gains weight.

A female cockatiel that is getting ready to lay an egg will often become very cage-territorial, hissing and trying to keep hands away. She will often drink considerably more water to supply the water-rich egg albumen. Hens will often hold droppings all night and pass a large, malodorous dropping first thing in the morning. As the abdominal muscles relax from hormonal influence, the abdomen will appear a bit more rounded and soft. All of these signs will indicate that your hen is ready to lay an egg.

If you notice a firm bulge near your hen's cloaca and she is no longer passing droppings, or if she is sitting on the bottom of the cage, this is now a medical emergency. Seek veterinary attention as soon as possible as this might mean that she has a retained egg.

### Top 10 Pet Cockatiel Vet Questions #7

My pet cockatiel laid an egg. Should I leave the egg with her, or take it away? Should I take her to the vet?

If your female has successfully laid an egg, congratulations! Chances are that she will be fine.

Pet cockatiel hens are indeterminate layers; they will continue laying eggs until they have completed a clutch of eggs. It is always best to leave the egg(s) with the hen so that she thinks she has completed her cycle. If she has oviposited in a food dish, or on the bottom of the cage, leave the eggs right there.

She will usually attempt to incubate them, so if she is interested in her eggs, leave them with her. If an egg has broken, you can dispose of it. If you can acquire a similar size egg, made of alabaster, marble or ceramic, paint it white with nontoxic acrylic paint and see if your hen accepts that egg and begins sitting on it.

If she appears interested, let her sit on the egg(s) for about 20 to 21 days, the length of time for fertile cockatiel eggs to hatch successfully. I know this is inconvenient, as your hen will probably fuss at you for trying to clean her cage or feed her, but it is important.

If you remove any eggs, the female cockatiel might continue to lay them in an attempt to complete her clutch. The record in my practice is 27 eggs, and is not one that you should attempt to beat. With every egg, the female cockatiel becomes more depleted of nutrients, especially protein and calcium.

If your female cockatiel has suddenly become depressed, if she is sitting on the bottom of the cage, if her abdomen appears swollen or if you notice droppings stuck to her vent, she should be examined by your avian veterinarian in case she is having a problem with her cycle.

### Top 10 Pet Cockatiel Vet Questions #8

There is stuff in my pet bird's nares. Do I need to clean it out?

When in doubt, have your avian veterinarian examine your pet cockatiel. He or she can tell you if there is a problem.

You can do the following at home to help: take your pet bird into a steamy bathroom while you or a family member showers, so that the bird's respiratory system is kept moist. Try misting your bird with warm water several times per day.

All cockatiels have an operculum inside the nares, which is a keratinized flap. Sometimes the powder down may accumulate inside the nares, over the operculum. That's why increased humidity will help dislodge and remove any debris.

Never stick a sharp object into pet bird nares to dislodge debris. If that is necessary, your avian veterinarian should do it.

#### Top 10 Pet Cockatiel Vet Questions #9

Can I catch any diseases from my pet cockatiel?

The most significant disease that is often associated with the cockatiel is chlamydiosis. *Chlamydophila* sp. is a primitive bacterium that some pet cockatiels can carry without showing overt signs of illness. Many pet cockatiels with chlamydiosis show respiratory signs or systemic signs of illness. In some cases, chlamydiosis causes slow liver damage.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to accurately diagnose *Chlamydophila* in 100 percent of live bird cases. Several accurate tests exist, but pet cockatiels can keep this bacterium under the radar and veterinarians won't always get a positive test result in an infected bird.

For families with immunocompromised members in the home, for nursing homes or for anyone with HIV or AIDS, test the pet bird and place it on a 45-day course of the antibiotic doxycycline either orally or in drinking water. This minimizes the risk of an infected bird shedding the organism into the environment, even if the bird tests negative for *Chlamydophila*.

Rarely, pet cockatiels carry the bacterium, *Staphylococcus* that can cause MRSA (methicillin resistant *Staph. aureus*), a potentially dangerous disease in humans and other animals. Other bacteria, such as the *Salmonella* group, can transmit to humans.

Pet birds, especially those with abundant powder-down like the pet cockatiel, can afflict people with a condition known as bird keeper's lung disease (hypersensitivity pneumonitis or allergic alveolitis). This very dangerous allergic reaction in humans results from exposure to bird dust and dander. The only way to stop ongoing lung damage is by preventing exposure to birds entirely. This is often heartbreaking as it is most likely to occur in people with pet birds.

#### Top 10 Pet Cockatiel Vet Questions #10

Should I have the wing feathers trimmed on my pet cockatiel or should I let him fly?

While I love letting birds fly for exercise and mental well-being, this is impractical in many cases. Pet birds that fly are more likely to be of a healthy weight and have fewer problems with egg-binding, but there are definite downsides.

Pet cockatiels that have regained the ability to fly often become more surly, aggressive, independent and detached, making it difficult for owners to catch a loose bird to place it back in the cage.

Flighted pet birds always risk escaping from home by mistake. An owner might answer the door with a pet bird on his or her shoulder, and the pet bird might make a break for it. Others might become frightened and fly out an open door or window.

A bird can become injured if it flies into a mirror or window. I have actually had a client's bird fly into a window screen, punch the screen out of the frame and then fly away.

Pet birds outdoors can be prey to hawks, osprey or other hunting raptors. They may be captured by neighborhood cats or dogs. It is possible that they could fly into a body of water and drown.

Pet cockatiels are powerful fliers so you must have your pet cockatiel's wing feathers trimmed by a person familiar with cockatiels. With most pet parrots, I clip the last five primary wing feathers all the way at the base of the feather, leaving the coverts intact. But with pet cockatiels, I often trim six or seven, test-flying the bird after removing five on each side, then removing another on each side, and test-flying again, until the bird can drift gently to the ground, not gaining any lift or traveling any distance horizontally.

The decision of whether or not to trim your pet cockatiel's wing feathers is a personal one and should be made after discussing your home situation with your avian vet. When in doubt, have the feathers trimmed, as they will grow back within about six months.

Check your bird's wings frequently, as once two feathers have grown in on each wing; your pet cockatiel will most likely regain flight. Many birds fly away because their owners didn't realize that the feathers had grown back in and the bird had regained flight.

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