

## Bird Cancer Treatment Options

### **Treatment options if your bird has cancerous tumors**

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It is not uncommon for budgies and other small birds to be diagnosed with cancer. Courtesy Seth & Jacquie Miller, KY

When dealing with tumors, in some cases, complete surgical removal is curative. There is always a concern, however, that a tumor might have already spread to other organs. Additional tests might be necessary, including radiographs, MRIs or CT scans, to ascertain if any suspicious masses are present elsewhere in the body. When dealing with a malignant tumor on a limb, it is often best to amputate the limb to try to prevent problems with cancer reoccurring in the future. While this may seem like a drastic measure, birds adapt well to the loss of a limb (or partial limb).

With some cancers, in addition to surgical excision of the mass, chemotherapy or radiation therapy may be warranted. Sophisticated treatments and procedures are now available for avian patients with cancer; however, these may only be available at referral centers, veterinary colleges and specialty centers.

As with other species, cancer rates increase as avian patients age. Since avian medicine has dramatically improved the quality of life for many birds, and birds are living longer lives, we can expect to see more cases of avian cancer in older birds, however it is not unusual to see some types of cancer in budgies and other small birds that are as young as 4 or 5 years of age.

Fibrosarcomas (tumors arising from connective tissue) are one of the more common types of cancer found in birds, and these are often seen on the wing or leg. They are most often diagnosed in budgerigars, cockatiels, macaws and other species of parrot. They often feel like a firm mass surrounding a long bone, and, if large enough, this type of tumor might result in the skin over it becoming ulcerated from the bird picking at it or because the skin has become compromised.

If discovered early on, surgical removal, often involving amputation of the limb, can be curative, however, these are likely to metastasize to lung, liver, bone or elsewhere with time. I have removed many a fibrosarcoma, most often from the wings of cockatiels, and most have gone on to live long, happy lives, albeit, with only one wing remaining!