

## Treat A Burn - Fast

**Although we all hope to never face an accident involving our avian friends, it's best to always be prepared and know basic first aid. We can't always be in control of all situations with our birds.**

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The week that I graduated from vet school, my roommate and I hosted a party for some classmates. At the time, I had a wonderful pet lutino cockatiel named Buzzy, I was in the kitchen stirring a pot of chili when a friend came into the kitchen, with Buzzy on his shoulder. Something startled Buzzy, and she flew off his shoulder, directly into the pot of hot chili. She screamed, I screamed and then I grabbed her out of the hot pot. I immediately rinsed her legs and torso off in cool water for 10 minutes. This quick reaction prevented her from serious injury or even death.

### Take Action Dos

In the case of a scald-type burn (from chemicals, hot liquid or fire), flush the affected area with cool (not cold) running water for 10 to 15 minutes. This will lower the skin temperature, stop burning and reduce inflammation. Third-degree burns require prompt medical attention. On your way to the vet, cover the burned skin with cool, sterile dressings or sterile gauze squares moistened with sterile saline. Contact lens saline that is preservative free is a good source of this.

Electrical burns often result from a curious bird with a strong beak. Initially, an electrical burn might appear minor or not show on the skin or beak; the damage, however, can extend deep into the tissues of the body. A strong electrical current that passes through the body can result in internal damage, such as a heart rhythm disturbance or cardiac arrest. The jolt associated with an electrical burn can sometimes cause a bird to be thrown back or to fall, resulting in broken bones or other traumatic injuries.

If a bird bites through an electrical cord (or, in the unlikely situation that a bird is struck by lightning), look first; don't touch the bird until you are certain that it is not in contact with the electrical source. If the bird is still in contact with the live wire, you are also at risk for electrocution. Turn off the electricity at the source (such as the circuit-breaker). If that is not possible or will take too long, move the source away from the bird (and other animals or humans in the area), using a non-conducting object, such as cardboard, plastic or wood (non-metallic objects).

Next, check for breathing and heartbeat. [See section on CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) to learn how to perform these techniques correctly.] If necessary, perform assisted breathing or CPR until the bird begins functioning on its own or it is transferred to a veterinarian's care.

Any bird with a burn can quickly go into shock and begin losing body heat. After administering first aid, and CPR if necessary, call your avian veterinarian or veterinary emergency clinic to notify them that you will be arriving with an injured pet bird.

Prepare your bird for transportation to the vet hospital with a secure, warm and dark carrier to minimize stress during the trip. Provide warmth by utilizing a hot water bottle, a Ziplock® plastic bag filled with warm water, a latex glove filled with warm water or an air-activated chemical hand heating packet, ensuring that the heating device will not burn the bird further.

### Don'ts

Burns, which are potentially life-threatening injuries, can happen in a split second, so knowing what not to do in this type of emergency is as important as knowing what to do.

Do not attempt to treat burns without a veterinarian other than immediate first aid.

Never use grease, ointment or butter on a burn. These products insulate the skin, causing its temperature to rise and increase the pain factor.

Do not remove or pull any feathers or debris that are stuck to the skin or are incorporated into the burn unless it comes off easily during an initial cool-water rinse.

Do not apply ice to the burn.

Do not pop or lance any blisters.

Do not cover a burn with a blanket or towel, because the loose fibers can stick to the burn.

Do not attempt to administer any oral medications to an unconscious bird.

A bird suffering from any type of burn will require protracted medical care until the burn heals. Second or third degree burns might mandate time in the veterinary ICU so that IV fluids, electrolytes, pain medication, antibiotics and daily wound care can be administered. Burns can be very dangerous, but with diligent medical care, recovery is possible.

#### Inside The Avian Skin

A bird's skin is much thinner and delicate than our skin. There are three layers of the skin: the epidermis outer layer; the dermis, which is thinner than that of mammals; and the subcutaneous layer, which is formed by primarily connective tissue. Over the extremities, head and sternum, the skin firmly attaches to underlying muscle and bone.

The sun causes frequent burns in humans, but this is not a common problem with pet birds. On the other hand, the sun does cause heatstroke in our pets. Other sources of burns in birds include hot liquids, hot surfaces, chemicals, fire and electricity.