

Small Birds – Baby Bird With Splay Leg

Baby budgies have splay leg and an owner asks how to help them

By Diane Grindol

First Published January 2006

Bring baby birds to see an avian veterinarian if you suspect splay leg.

Q: I have two mating budgies (parakeets), Julie and Prince. A few months ago, they laid eggs, but the baby birds have splay legs. They have to stay on the cage bars instead of being able to perch like normal birds. Is it curable? How can I help them?

A: The sooner splay leg is treated, the more successful the outcome for the baby birds. Splay leg is usually treated while the chick's bones are still forming – usually while in the nest or being hand-fed. Your birds are probably past this stage. To determine this, have them examined by an avian veterinarian.

You want to make your baby birds comfortable. Observe where in the cage the splay-legged birds like to hang out, and provide perches for them in those locations. I had a friend with a crippled budgie that lived long past expectations because she provided soft places for him to rest by padding perches with tissue and other soft barriers.

There are a variety of possible reasons for splay leg. If the chick was malpositioned in the egg or has a genetic fault, there's not much you can do. If you continue to have this problem, you might want to consider not breeding this pair.

Other possible reasons for splay leg are either a nutritional deficiency or a slippery nest box floor. You'll have the healthiest chicks if you have healthy parents and you meet their needs while they have chicks. There are breeding formulas for most pelleted diets, with the extra calcium and protein and other supportive nutrition that a breeding pair needs. Vitamin D3 from sunlight is also important for processing calcium.

To prevent a slippery nest box surface, try using clean pine shavings, aspen shavings or a product like Care Fresh in your nest box.

It's always disappointing when things don't go perfectly with a clutch of babies, but this is how aviculturists learn. A seminar or talking with an experienced breeder or avian veterinarian can help, too.