

Your Pet Bird's "Stay Healthy Plan" For The Year

Keep your pet bird healthy with this month-to-month guide.

By Laura Doering

Follow this guide for your pet bird's stay-healthy plan for the whole year.

January

If you don't already have one, find an avian veterinarian, one who specializes in pet birds, and make a well-bird appointment for your bird. (For a list of veterinarians who treat birds, visit aav.org). Make a list of questions in advance, such as the best diet for your species of bird, including serving ratios.

February

Look into getting pet health insurance for your bird. Find out what procedures are covered and what your deductible will be (prices can vary, depending on your bird's species, age and medical history). Open a savings account ear-marked exclusively for your bird's health care costs, and contribute to it each month.

March

Ask your avian vet how often your species of bird should be groomed (i.e. monthly; bi-monthly) and mark those dates on your calendar. Schedule standing appointments with your vet or professional bird groomer (or mark them on your calendar if you are comfortable grooming your bird yourself so you don't forget).

April

Join a local bird club. Many clubs invite well-respected avian veterinarians and researchers to speak to their members. They also raise funds to help support those researching avian diseases that most affect pet birds. Bird club members can also recommend a good avian vet and they can help mentor you.

May

Go through your bird's area to clear it of potentially hazardous items. Many birds are quite inquisitive, with curious beaks that find chew toys out of your belongings. Some of these might not only be items you cherish, such as your antique table, but items that are toxic to birds if ingested, such as a poisons plant or chips of lead paint from your walls.

Look into attending one of the many avian conferences and conventions offered throughout the year. You'll hear top avian researchers and veterinarians talk about the latest medical advances. Many conferences also feature outings to local attractions, which makes them a great family vacation destination, too.

June

Buy a scale, one that weighs in grams as opposed to ounces. Weigh your bird at the same time each day or every other day, such as in the morning, and keep track of your bird's weight. Ask your vet what parameters are acceptable for your bird, taking into account your bird's species and lifestyle, and what weight fluctuations should raise a red flag.

July

Let your bird take advantage of natural light with supervised time outdoors in a travel cage, carrier or on a harness. Purchase UV-lighting sources designed for indoor use.

August

Make sure your bird has had its annual test for PDD, psittacosis and PBFD; which most boarding facilities and vet offices require prior to allowing your bird to board there.

September

Purchase a home-filtration system to help filter out fine particulate matter, which can irritate your bird's delicate respiratory system, and yours.

October

Become familiar with what your bird's normal droppings look like so you can spot any changes that might indicate a health problem.

November

Create a list of safety rules for your family in regard to your pet bird. Household members should let each other know when the pet bird is out so care can be taken when opening doors or windows, or letting out other pets. Household members should also be in a habit of keeping the toilet lid down and putting covers on other open bodies of water (e.g. pots and pans). to prevent accidental drowning. (Small, flighty birds are especially prone to taking flight and landing in an open toilet or other exposed water source.)

December

Make sure your chimney or fireplace is clear of debris and properly venting before firing it up. The dust and debris can irritate your bird's respiratory system.

Once A Week

Check your bird's toys for wear and tear. Frayed rope perches can cause your bird's toe to become ensnared and torn; its beak or toe can be caught in an open chain link; your bird might remove the clasp from a bell toy, which can pose a choking hazard. Remove and replace any toy or perch that is heavily worn or if missing pieces that might deem it unsafe.

Wash and dry your bird's cage cover. (Use scent-free detergent).

All Year Long

Prepare your meals with your bird mind. Your bird will appreciate sharing some of your food, but make it bird-friendly: leave the oil and heavy sauce off the pasta, offer salt- and butter-free scrambled egg, use a natural sweetener, such as applesauce, instead of sugar to sweeten bran muffins — you'll all be healthier for it!

Make an effort to supplement your bird's core diet with fresh vegetables, sprouted seed and healthy treats, such as bits of fruit and birdie bread.

Every Day Or Every Other Day

Change the paper liner or bedding in your bird's cage, and wipe down its perches and toys.

Offer your bird the opportunity to bathe either via a spray bath, on a shower perch, under a running faucet or in a shallow dish of water.