

EMERGENCY SICK BIRD CARE

There are five important elements to consider in supportive care of a sick (or injured) bird, listed in order of importance:

1. Heat
2. Humidity
3. Fluids
4. Nutrition
5. Quiet/Level of Activity

1) Birds use a considerable amount of their energy and metabolic resources in keeping their body temperature up (at around 104 degrees.). Therefore, the single most important thing you can do for a sick bird is to artificially support its temperature, thus freeing as much of its energy as possible for dealing with the illness. The correct temperature is at least 85 degrees, and 90 degrees is preferable. Turn up the heat past 85 until the bird begins to pant, then slowly back it off just until the panting stops. When the bird begins to recover, remember to lower the temp gradually, no more than 5 degrees per day, until back to room temp.

2) Humidity is extremely important in cases of respiratory involvement in the illness, as it eases the breathing and helps the bird keep the air passages clear and moist. A vaporizer is best, a humidifier will work, and in a pinch placing the bird in the bathroom and periodically running hot water in the shower is better than nothing. If there is NO respiratory involvement, or the bird is physically injured and not ill, humidity is not so important. Respiratory involvement is indicated by any of the following: wheezy, raspy, bubbly, or clicking noises in the breathing; discharge from nostrils; breathing heavily or with difficulty (if the tail moves noticeably as the bird breathes, it is breathing heavily); beak held open to breathe but not panting.

3) A sick bird is easily dehydrated, especially since it may not drink as much on its own, its temperature is elevated, and its digestion may be disrupted. In extreme cases a veterinarian may administer fluids under the skin, but oral fluids are also very helpful. If your bird isn't drinking a lot on its own, give fluids from your finger, a spoon, or by syringe. Some suggestions for fluids to give: Infalyte brand infant electrolyte solution, apple or grape juice, D5W (medical glucose/saline solution), bottled water with a little sugar or honey. Don't use Gatorade, it's too high in salt!

4) As you are maximizing the amount of energy the bird can use in fighting the illness by elevating the ambient temperature, you should also ensure that food energy continues to be available. The best things to give a sick bird are high in carbohydrates and easy to digest. Examples: hand-feeding formula, infant rice cereal, baby food, ground-up pellets mixed with fruit juice, molasses, honey, Instant Ounces brand emergency food for birds, cream of wheat, papaya juice or nectar, fruit juice (except orange). If your bird doesn't eat on its own while ill, you need to hand feed it, or force feed it if necessary. Birds can starve to death in 48 - 72 hours when healthy, and can go even faster when ill. Inadequate nutrition will severely impact the bird's ability to recover from the illness. 5) Keep an ill or injured bird quiet and inactive. Keep it in semidarkness with no toys and nothing to climb or play on, much as you would keep a sick child in bed and encourage it to sleep. Limit noisy activities or move the bird to a quiet part of the house. Additional notes: If the bird regurgitates food or fluids, you may be giving too much. Try smaller amounts more frequently. If your bird is on antibiotic therapy, remember that these drugs also kill the "friendly" bacteria that help it to digest its food. Give yogurt, bene-bac, lactobacillus supplement, or acidophilus to help digestion and to prevent backlash Candida (yeast) infections. If you see any sign of yeast (white spots in mouth or on tongue), call the vet and get an antifungal preparation to give with the antibiotic.

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