

EGG BINDING

General Information

While most female birds have no problems laying eggs, occasionally they may encounter difficulty. When detected early, the condition can usually be resolved easily. If a prolonged period of time has elapsed since attempts at egg laying began, the bird may become critically ill. Most owners are surprised that a female bird not exposed to a male will lay eggs. If owners keep in mind that human females ovulate regardless of the presence of a male, then it makes sense that a female bird ovulates without a male as well. The major difference is that the egg is microscopic in people and so not easily visualized, whereas in birds the egg is large, has a shell, and is expelled from the bird.

What causes egg binding?

Egg binding occurs when the female bird is unable to expel the egg from her body. There are numerous factors why this may occur. Many birds are improperly fed by their owners and eat nothing but seeds. Seeds are deficient in many vitamins and minerals, especially calcium, vitamin E and selenium. These vitamins and minerals are necessary for proper contraction of the muscles of the oviducts; improper muscle contractions can result in failure to pass the egg. Egg deformities may also occur. Obesity (from an all seed diet), lack of exercise, heredity, senility, and improper environment are other causes of egg binding.



Are certain birds prone to develop egg binding?

Yes. Budgerigars, canaries, cockatiels, finches, and lovebirds most frequently have problems related to egg laying, although any bird can become egg bound.

How can I tell if my bird is egg bound?

Many owners do not even know if the pet is a female, and often don't suspect egg binding as a cause of their pet's illness. Predetermining the sex of your pet bird by a simple blood test can aid your veterinarian in considering egg binding as a possible cause of your pet's illness.

Birds with egg binding are usually depressed, fail to perch, often sit on the bottom of the cage, and may strain as if trying to lay an egg. If the egg is putting pressure on the nerves that control the legs, paralysis may result. Since the signs associated with egg binding are also seen in sick birds with other causes of illness, diagnostic testing is essential in formulating a proper diagnosis.

How is egg binding diagnosed?

During the physical examination your veterinarian may palpate (feel) the egg inside of the bird. Usually radiographs (X-rays) are needed to diagnose egg binding. Early diagnosis is important; smaller birds can die within a few hours of becoming egg bound.

How is egg binding treated?

Treatment varies with how sick the bird is when presented to your veterinarian as well as the location of the egg and the length of time the bird has been egg bound. Critically ill birds are first treated for shock and then attempts are made to treat the egg binding. Mildly affected birds may



respond to supplemental heat, calcium, vitamin E, selenium, and vitamin D-3. Other injectable drugs may help cause the oviduct to contract and expel the egg. If the egg is near the cloacal opening it might be gently extracted. Eggs that do not pass with drug therapy require more aggressive treatment. A needle may need to be placed through the abdomen into the eggshell to aspirate the contents of the egg, causing the shell to collapse. The shell will usually pass out of the bird within a few days. Failing this, surgery may be performed to remove the egg or shell fragments.

Can egg binding be prevented?

Birds on a poor diet should have the diet changed following instructions from your veterinarian. Calcium, phosphorus, vitamin and mineral supplementation may be recommended. Obesity should also be corrected. Birds that are chronic egg layers might respond to hormonal drug therapy, although this can be associated with severe side effects. A hysterectomy can also be performed to prevent egg laying and egg binding.