

## YOUR NEW PET BIRD: THE INITIAL VISIT

Many bird owners are surprised to learn that all pets, including their birds, need an initial visit by an avian veterinarian and at least an annual checkup (a number of avian (bird) veterinarians actually recommend checkups at least twice a year, to allow for early detection and treatment of potentially life-threatening diseases.) Regular veterinary care is necessary in order to ensure your bird lives a long, healthy life. The most important visit is the very first one, right after you acquire your pet bird. During this visit, the veterinarian will perform a physical examination and various diagnostic testing, to determine your bird's state of health and see if your pet might be harboring any diseases that require treatment. The visit should also include a thorough discussion of proper feeding, housing, care, and grooming of your new pet. The most important part of this initial visit is to feel comfortable with the doctor and the hospital staff. Make sure your bird's veterinarian is qualified to treat pet birds. Avian medicine has become a specialized part of veterinary medicine, and most general practitioners are not comfortable or knowledgeable in avian (pet bird) medicine. Ask the doctor about his qualifications. At a minimum, he should be a member in good standing of the AAV (Association of Avian Veterinarians.)



### ***Parts of the Avian Checkup***

While each doctor has his own protocol on what is done during the initial visit, the following tests may be recommended to keep your bird healthy. Many avian veterinarians recommend performing some or all of these tests under short-acting gas anesthesia, using an anesthetic like isoflurane or sevoflurane. Most birds can be safely anesthetized for the short period of time needed to perform the diagnostic testing. It is usually much easier and safer to perform procedures on birds under anesthesia, as they are not stressed out when anesthetized and stress is a major factor in birds dying when handled.

**Physical Examination** - Every visit starts with a thorough physical examination. During the physical, the doctor will record your pet's weight, general appearance, and mobility. He will palpate (feel) various parts of the pet's body. Any abnormalities that are noted or changes that have occurred since the previous visit may indicate the need for specialized testing.

**Blood Testing** - Just as your regular visit includes blood testing, so does a checkup for pets. Blood testing can include a complete blood count (examining the red blood cells, white blood cells, and thrombocytes) and serum biochemical profile (which looks at various organ enzymes.)

**Specialized Testing** - Additional testing may include testing for chlamydiosis (also called psittacosis, this tests for a disease which is transmissible to other pets and to people,) polyoma virus, or beak and feather disease. The need for testing will depend

upon findings from other tests or your species of birds (some species are more likely to develop certain diseases.)

**Fecal Analysis** - Microscopic examination of the feces allows detection of parasites (coccidian and worms.)



**Microbiological Testing** - Special stains called Gram's stains allow examination of the cloacal and choanal regions of your bird. The doctor uses these stains to determine the presence of abnormal bacteria and yeasts. Depending upon the findings from the Gram's stains, additional tests such as a culture and sensitivity may be needed to determine the species of bacteria or yeasts and the proper treatment.

**Radiological Testing** - Using X-rays the doctor can examine your pet's body for abnormalities in the size, shape, and position of body organs; screen for masses such as tumors or granulomas; look for abnormal fluid accumulation; and check the bones and joints.

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*This client information sheet is based on material written by Rick Axelson, DVM & Shawn Messonnier, DVM*

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