

OBESITY

General Information

As with other pets, obesity is a problem often encountered with birds. Obesity is a major problem in older birds and can contribute to diseases commonly seen in geriatric birds such as fatty liver disease (hepatic lipidosis). Our pet birds are usually confined to a cage, have their wings trimmed to prevent flight, and receive little if any exercise. This, in conjunction with high fat diets, often leads to obesity and its associated problems.



What is obesity?

In dogs and cats, obesity is defined as a pet that weighs 15% or more than its ideal weight. While we don't have as clear-cut a definition for birds, this is probably a safe guideline to use.

What causes obesity?

Obesity is the result of taking in more calories than are burned off by the pet. Unlike their wild counterparts, pet birds are not given the opportunity for daily exercise, which includes flying to escape predators and to look for food. Pet birds burn off very few calories in their daily lives. Additionally, most owners incorrectly feed their pet birds by offering a diet consisting mostly or totally of seeds. Seeds are deficient in many vitamins and minerals and they are high in fat (the birds like seeds because the fat makes them taste good). A high-fat diet and no exercise predispose birds to obesity.

Are there any problems associated with obesity?

Obese pets have an increased risk of many diseases, including arthritis, heart disease, and cancer. Many obese birds develop hepatic lipidosis, also called "Fatty Liver Disease". These birds are extremely susceptible to infections and stress; many obese birds have been known to die just from the stress of an examination at the veterinarian's office. Finally, obese birds have a higher anesthetic risk than normal-weight birds.

How do I cure obesity in my bird?

Switching birds from an all-seed diet to a more suitable diet consisting of pellets, fresh vegetables, and fruit will decrease its daily intake of calories. Be advised that birds that are hooked on a seed diet may not easily switch to the preferred pelleted diet. Your veterinarian can give you tips on slowly switching the diet (a bird's diet should NEVER be switched quickly, as the bird may refuse to eat and literally starve to death).

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