# Table of Contents

**About Cockatoos and their Health** .................................................................3

**Affecting Diseases and Illness** .................................................................3
  - Pacheco’s Virus .............................................................................. 3
  - Polyomavirus ............................................................................. 4
  - Beak and Feather Syndrome .................................................. 4
  - Wasting Disease ......................................................................... 5
  - Papilloma ..................................................................................... 5
  - Psittacosis .................................................................................... 5
  - E-coli ............................................................................................. 5
  - Gout ............................................................................................... 6
  - Runny Nose or Nasal Discharge .............................................. 6

**Shelter from 10 most common injuries** .................................................7
  - Broken Blood Feather ............................................................ 7
  - Constricted Toe .......................................................................... 7
  - Crop Burn .................................................................................... 7
  - Crop Punctures ........................................................................... 7
  - Dehydration ................................................................................ 7
  - Stretched Crop ............................................................................ 8
  - Splay Leg ....................................................................................... 8
  - Slipped Tendon ........................................................................... 8
  - Crooked, or Scissors, Beak ..................................................... 9
  - Split Sternum ................................................................................ 9

**Dealing with Disabilities** .................................................................9
  - When Problems Become Evident .......................................... 10
  - The First Two Weeks ................................................................. 10

**Resolving Residual Food Anxieties** ..................................................11

**Healing your Pet** ...................................................................................11

**Acknowledgements** ............................................................................13
About Cockatoos and their Health

After going through the detailed process of assessing various Cockatoo species, and then choosing the one which really fits in for your lifestyle and your needs, you have finally brought your new pet home. Now you just want to sit back and enjoy the entertainment that comes from a Cockatoo that can ‘talk’ to you, play with you, and entertain you. But is your Cockatoo ‘ready’ to bond with you?

Many Cockatoo maladies set in without a warning, as they are air-borne and can often be hard to control. It is advisable to seek professional advice whenever you suspect a crisis. However, there may be times when no professional medical assistance is available, which means you must take it upon yourself to identify and diagnose the problem and select remedy. This is a handy guide to help you learn about the possible causes of your Cockatoo’s illness.

Affecting Diseases and Illness

Most viruses that communicate diseases to Cockatoos are fatal, as shown by studies throughout avian medicinal history. Some of the common illnesses include:

**Pacheco’s Virus**

Set off by intranuclear, airborne microorganisms that spread easily, this proves to be fatal for many birds. It is easy to diagnose your Cockatoo if Pacheco’s Virus infects it. The bird needs to be administered a strong oral dose of Zovirax medication.
Vaccines are easily available for this disease, but they can bring about tumors and carriers. Evidence shows that Cockatoos are likely to die shortly after inoculation.

**Polyomavirus**

Polyomavirus largely attacks the young ones. Though not much a great deal is known about this disease currently, vaccines are being invented that could foil the exposure of the virus to large parts of the Cockatoo’s body. This virus is again air-borne and complicated to control. Look for clinical warning signs like depression, delayed crop emptying, anorexia, diarrhea, regurgitation and weight loss in Cockatoos.

**Beak and Feather Syndrome**

Some believe that PBFDS affects only Cockatoos. However, this is not correct. Spread by feather dust and dried feces, Cockatoos infected with PBFDS show abnormal growth of new feathers. The new-fanged shafts look as if swollen and gnarled. Cockatoos have beaks that are black and shiny rather than covered with feather dust. Although dust bunches are not formed in young cockatoos, the older ones usually have them. If there are no tufts, it increases the possibility of Beak and Feather Syndrome with Cockatoos. Another type of PBFDS symptom that is quite prevalent is growth abnormality of the beak. Some Cockatoos may have long beaks that eventually break off. At its progressive stages, this PBFDS can cause paralysis and eventual death.

Recent medical tests show positive results in diagnosing this disease even in carriers, which eventually spread to younger lots. Any Cockatoo in its tender age is susceptible to such infection and is less likely to succumb. Conversely, older Cockatoos seem to have natural protection and immunity to this disease. There is currently no known cure for this disease.
**Wasting Disease**
This is prevalent among Cockatoos of all breeds. A highly contagious disease, Wasting Disease is not as fast in opening out as Pacheco’s. Wasting Diseases are hard to reckon since they lie dormant for years, until hosts are on a move. Studies on Cockatoo show Wasting Diseases have a severe effect on nervous systems extended to all of the major organs, triggering seizures, paralysis, and tremors, and also heart attacks. There is no known medication available for Wasting Disease, but changing the food patterns of the Cockatoos by including easily digestible diet supplements may prolong the life of a victim.

**Psittacosis**
Psittacosis is another most dreaded bacterial infection that commonly occurs in the Cockatoos and is transmitted via feather dust and dried feces. Generally, humans who are diagnosed of having Psittacosis show symptoms similar to pneumonia, which if not diagnosed or treated immediately may prove to be fatal. Among the various tests available today, there are conclusive and positive signals of these bacteria being transmitted through the carriers. Consult your avian veterinarian for details.

**Papilloma**
Appearing primarily in the throat or vent areas, papilloma is caused by a virus infection similar to warts. It grows large enough to block the vent, making it difficult or even impossible for the host to defecate. Cockatoos diagnosed of Papilloma can be cured after successful laser surgery.

**E-coli**
This bacterium is not so lethal if it is acknowledged and treated at initial stages. In fact, when Cockatoos are diagnosed of having E-coli, their droppings usually have
the appearance of diarrhea, giving out strong odor.

**Gout**

Calcification of the kidneys among the Cockatoos is common especially among the babies who are aged 4-8 weeks. In such cases, victims rarely survive.

Initially they show regurgitating and slight dehydration after feedings. In addition, babies who appear slightly smaller than their regular sizes, with protruding neck bone have the largest possibility of incurring Gout. Blood tests are also a good measure to check the high levels of urates in the blood. Overall, the Cockatoos wear a tight look of a dehydrated bird with droopy eyes and reddened skin.

A severe impact can result in Cockatoos having transparent skin on the crop and the veins become more visible than usual.

**Runny Nose or Nasal Discharge**

The most common of all nasal discharge is laxity of Vitamin-A in Cockatoos. This deficiency can be corrected by increasing the food quantities that are rich in vitamins and mineral contents especially. Remember, that a proportionate value is the fundamental reason for preventing health problems in Cockatoos. You can also use antibiotic nasal drops under a vet’s supervision to clear the nasal passage when Cockatoos have a runny nose.
Shelter from 10 most common injuries

**Broken Blood Feather**

The most common and painless way to fix a broken blood feather injury is to pull the feathers out. Actually, when not fully formed, a blood feather splits, and the shaft works as a straw emitting blood, which gushes out without stinting. It is very difficult to cease the bleeding, and I recommend you secure the pulled-off feather carefully with pliers, underneath the wing, and drag it straight out without causing injury to the feather follicle.

**Constricted Toe**

It is mostly seen among Cockatoos of tender age. When contracted, due to low humidity they develop layers of rings underneath their skin, which eventually begins to contract, and gradually snaps the blood circulation of the toe. If the constrictions are not removed, it causes the toe to dry up resulting lameness in Cockatoos.

**Crop Burn**

Indeed, a preventable injury set off by feeding hot and piping food to the Cockatoos, which can burn the crop areas creating a hole at the outer layer. In case of severe crop burn, the digestive system is disrupted and will have to be sutured.

**Crop Punctures**

‘Crop punctures’ normally occur either by sloppiness or due to feeding naïveté. The only plausible approach to correct such quandaries in Cockatoos is simply to suture the interior and external crop layers of the skin. Many vets prescribe antibiotics to foil the spread of infection. However, if this remains unattended, the infection will gradually settle down resulting in the baby-Cockatoo starving to death.

**Dehydration**

When a Cockatoo starts showing reddened skin that is un-elastic, it is
a sure sign to recognize that the Cockatoo is suffering from dehydration. Your main concern should be to provide the bird with enough watery intakes until it is remedied.

**Stretched Crop**
This is a precarious situation seen commonly among Cockatoos that need hand feeding. Caused when you try to feed too much food in one single feed, it overfills and stretches the crop muscles. Such situations when left unattended will slowly and gradually affect the digestive process more forcefully, causing weight loss and eventual death.

**Splay Leg**
Displayed in young babies, splay leg is a condition affecting birds that do not have sufficient strength to keep their footing on a slippery surface. It can often be seen in babies that are housed in containers that do not have sufficient bedding, or when the surface of the cage is too smooth for the bird to get his footing. The bird’s legs tend to spread out to sideways until he is unable to hold them under him properly. This condition needs to be remedied early on or it may become permanent as the bones harden in adulthood.

Splay leg can be corrected by securing the bird’s legs under him, but secure them at a distance that would be considered normal for him to stand. The time it takes to rectify the situation can depend on the severity of the condition as well as the bird’s age. You must also remember to remedy the situation that caused the onset of splay leg otherwise it may re-occur.

**Slipped Tendon**
This is evident in very young babies that are still developing physically. It is where the tendon slips to the side of the heel instead of fitting into the groove of the heel. This condition makes the baby look as though he is walking on the side of his foot.

To help correct this problem, you can secure the bird’s feet on a strip of
tape (as though standing him on a mouse sticky trap). When the bird gets older, the tendon could even be surgically pinned in place. And once it enlarges the groove in the heel it will retain the position without additional support.

**Crooked, or Scissors, Beak**

With this condition, the upper mandible is not aligned and does not close properly over the lower mandible. Although feeding technique may be one of the causes, heredity too can be a factor. Regardless of the cause or the age of the bird, this condition is generally correctable with persistent trimming of the upper and lower mandibles and the cleft that the upper mandible rests is located on the under side of the upper mandible.

**Split Sternum**

This is where the skin on the breast of the bird splits near the breastbone. This injury can be sustained by a Cockatoo falling from a t-stand or from the cage on to a hard surface or on to the floor.

**Dealing with Disabilities**

Sometimes your Cockatoo may have a disability that is not immediately obvious. Loss of sight is a frequent disability among grown-ups, which requires the home keepers to arrange a whole lot of things (such as toys, seeds etc.) in the coop at reachable locations. Provide toys with texture or ones that makes noise. But do not rotate them. A little common sense goes a long way in ensuring that your Cockatoo can work around his disability. For example, while working out with a sightless Cockatoo, permit him to fool around on the floor, under your guardianship.
When Problems Become Evident

A major reason why you should collect maximum information on your bird from its previous owner or the breeder is because it will help you solve his behavioral problems. An owner might tell you that he is giving up his Cockatoo because of the bird having a screaming problem. Anybody who has owned a Cockatoo for the last 8 years or so might have had to tolerate him screeching at the top of his voice for about 6-7 or even 8 long years. So, be more realistic in your approaches and expectations about how long it will take to make your Cockatoo the perfect mimic and how soon you will be able to share moments to be cherished. If your second hand Cockatoo has serious problems, consult an avian behavior consultant. Since every species has it own immune system, it is not necessary that any two Cockatoos of same breed will show similar reactions to the medication techniques. Habits like feather picking may have possible physical causes such as poor nutrition, allergic reactions, and environmental factors, and may not be behavioral patterns at all.

The First Two Weeks

The first two weeks after you get a Cockatoo home are crucial to establish a rapport between the two of you. Although Cockatoos are social birds, like all of us, they too take time to adjust to new environs. Also, if you have chosen a second-hand Cockatoo, it might come to you with certain behavioral problems. And it is quite likely that his previous owner has not divulged the problems to you. Before you attempt to build a relationship with your Cockatoo, assess his fear levels and evident disabilities. In case of an older Cockatoo, you must remember that the experiences he has gone through in the early years of his life will have shaped his personality. It would help to check:

1. Cockatoo’s apprehensions prior to medication.
2. Acquaint yourself with other physical disabilities that were left unattended at earlier instances.
3. Keep an eye on the Cockatoo to mark any behavioral changes.
4. Do you spot any instances of anxiety for food and eating patterns in the Cockatoos?
5. Pay attention on whether the Cockatoo keeps a company or prefers to be recluse in its cage.

**Resolving Residual Food Anxieties**

Always pay attention to the Cockatoo’s behavioral patterns and try to gauge if it shows anxiety for food or similar symptoms. These symptoms consist of repetitive calling, begging and exhibiting anxiety especially when food is plentiful. It is indispensable to “regression wean” since Cockatoos are inbred creatures, which favor their owner to feed them from hand or spoon. This triggers a familial bonding in addition to a sense of reassurance in the Cockatoo on an intense level. Ensure that your nervous, poorly socialized Cockatoo eats a healthy diet. Supplementing his diet with an essential fatty acid oil blend (you can buy it from a health food store) will not only give him a shiny, gorgeous plumage, but also boost his brain function. Sufficient EFAs in the diet are essential to help him learn new things.

**Healing your Pet**

Remember, just as Reiki is attuned with all curative practices, it is equally effective in healing animals as well as human beings. To tell the truth, animals accept Reiki more readily than human beings, because they do not possess mental, emotional or intellectual blocks that are typically found in human beings. There are various alternative therapeutic measures such as: acupuncture, homeopathy, herbal and flower remedies that are quite prevalent and effective in treating your pet. Although, Acupuncture practices are relatively new for Cockatoos, commonly applied acupuncture is the most effective means to deal
with arthritis, so if your Cockatoo develops gout problem give it a Chinese preventive course to heal.

Homeopathy is also an effective mode to treat your pet in a domestic environ especially in cases of psychological feather plucking sessions. Since homeopathic treatments are free of side effects, many pet lovers find it a completely safer modality to heal their ailing Cockatoos.

But for any domestic setup for dealing with a Cockatoo that comes to blows with other birds or procures aggressive nature, ‘Chinese flower treatment’ is the best practice to help overcome their fear or anxieties and make them adaptable to their new situations. Colloquially referred to as ‘Aromatic Bach treatment’, this generally condenses lack of confidence within Cockatoos and eases out similar stress problems. In addition, herbs, spices, and many food components can be used as curative modality in caring of our Cockatoos. Aviculturists over the years have secretly engaged these herbal solutions to keep birds hale and healthy. Regrettably, minimal availability of adequate avian books on the herbal usage has conspicuously witnessed the art being vanquished.

Nature's time-honored antidotes prove to be of great help in curing multiple maladies and bolster immunity among Cockatoos. However, for a healthy Cockatoo it is essential to take proper care of their diet constituents. A healthy pet is more likely to be immune to disease and more likely to be around for a long time to make you laugh, keep you entertained and give you a moment to smile…
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