

Cockatiel

(*Nymphicus hollandicus*)

Cockatiels are very sweet, loving birds that make great pets for anyone. They are quiet and many love to cuddle and have their head scratched and in return will preen your hair and clothes! They can be kept in places where loud pets are not allowed, like apartments and condos, and they are very healthy and intelligent pets who will recognize and want to be with their owner when they are home. They are perfect “first-time” birds and are a good choice for households with children.

General Diet:

Cockatiels, like other pet birds, need a diet with quality ingredients, and balanced levels of important vitamins, minerals and amino acids to maintain good health. A commercial diet that consists of high-quality extruded nuggets is the best diet for any exotic pet bird and should make up 80% of what the cockatiel eats every day. Many birds eat only seeds, but seed diets can contain high levels of fat and are deficient in important nutrients. An all-seed diet can lead to obesity and other nutritionally related diseases. Some birds may be difficult to convert from an all-seed diet to a more nutritious diet, but the health benefits will be worth it.

Vitamins/Supplements:

A high-quality commercial extruded diet contains balanced levels of important vitamins, minerals and amino acids. Additional supplements are not required and could be harmful to the bird. Many seed products have a vitamin and mineral coating on the hulls, and when birds eat the seed, they discard the hulls and the nutrients end up as waste. If supplements are added to the bird’s water, they may be discarded when the water is changed.

Treats/Extra Foods:

Although most fruits and vegetables are considered healthy additions to a cockatiel’s diet, they should not make up more than 10%-15% of the daily diet. Some are high in sugar and carbohydrates, some lack important nutrients, and because they add bulk and fiber, the bird will feel satisfied and not eat the more nutritious commercial diet. Feeding seeds as treats can be a part of an overall nutritious diet, but make sure they do not make up more than 10%-15% of the total daily diet.

Housing:

Cockatiels like a cage in which they can easily flap their wings. The bigger the cage, the better for the bird. Cockatiels should be kept in cages that have bars no more than half an inch wide. Luckily, there are many colors and styles to choose from and can be matched to the area that it will be placed. One feed cup and one water cup are basics with the cage along with perches and a tray on the bottom. Cage paper or bird litter is best to use in the tray, and never use colored newspaper, cedar shavings, or corn cob bedding.

Sanitation/General Care:

Make sure the bird has access to fresh, clean water. Every day scrub out the water dish with a light dishwashing detergent and rinse well. Make sure the bird always has food in his cup, but do not leave moistened food in the cup for long periods of time, especially in warm weather. The tray should be cleaned at least once a week or more often depending on cage size and the number of birds in the cage. Perches should also be cleaned (washed if plastic, scraped if wooden) once a week or as needed. At least once a month, clean out the cage completely by washing the bars, base, tray, and all toys and accessories made of plastic or metal thoroughly.

General Maintenance:

Most cockatiels rarely need beak trims, but owners should keep an eye on the bill just in case. If the bill needs to be trimmed, make an appointment with an avian veterinarian. Nails can grow quickly on cockatiels, and may need to be trimmed when they get too long. Birds can be offered special perches made out of a material that can help keep the nails short. For bathing, lightly mist your pet with a plant mister, or offer a birdbath, at least three times a week. Only mist or offer a bath to your pet in the morning.

Health Care:

With the proper nutrition, cockatiels are generally very hardy and healthy birds, and can live up to 6-8 years. Although vaccinations are not required at this time, cockatiels should be checked by a veterinarian every year for any underlying medical conditions, or if they show signs of illness such as lethargy, discharges, a change in their feces, or lack of appetite. Watch their bill and feet for any abnormal growths as well. Their cage should be kept in a draft-free area away from vents, windows or doors.

Special Section - Taming:

Young cockatiels are very sweet and should always be handled quietly and gently at first when taming. Young birds that are being tamed should have their wings trimmed (which is just like having your hair cut, it does not hurt at all). Then it is best to work with them in a small, quiet area. Keep them close to the floor, as they will try to fly. When the bird is on the floor, push a finger slowly and gently against its lower chest. Once the bird is on your finger, raise the hand and quietly talk to the bird. It may fly off a few times but be patient.

Supplies checklist:

- Perches of at least three different diameters
- High-quality commercial diet formulated specially for cockatiels
- Cage paper or bird litter
- Toys, especially a mirror if the bird is kept alone
- Beak conditioner
- Books
- Wire cage
- Food dish
- Water dish
- Treat dish