



THE CENTER FOR
**BIRD & EXOTIC
ANIMAL MEDICINE**

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Emergency First Aid Primer for Birds

Remember that all sick or injured birds will benefit from warmth (90-95 degrees) and being placed in a dark and quiet space until you can get medical help. Birds that have not been eating can be given corn syrup or pancake syrup (not sugar-free) diluted in water by eyedropper or syringe, in very small and frequent amounts. Below are first aid tips for specific injuries or illnesses.

1. **TRAUMA** often involves bleeding, fractures or concussion. The top priority is to stop bleeding. The most effective method to stop bleeding is direct pressure. Once the bleeding has stopped or slowed dramatically, styptic powder or flour may be used to help form a clot (do not use styptic or flour on any skin wound involving a broken bone). If a clot cannot be quickly formed, direct pressure should be continued and medical help sought immediately. Fractures (broken bones) do not require immediate medical care if a) the skin is closed over the fracture and there is no bleeding, AND b) the bird is stable, with no signs of shock or confusion/collapse.
2. **BURNS** must always be inspected by a veterinarian, even if the skin looks good. Many require shock therapy, pain control and antibiotics. Even in superficial burn cases, shock may onset within minutes to hours, causing a dramatic decrease in blood pressure with risks of organ damage and death. In many cases, the full extent of burn damage is not known for several days, but an assessment by a veterinarian should be made immediately.
3. **GASTROINTESTINAL DISEASE** includes anorexia (not eating), diarrhea, passing whole seed, and/or the crop remaining full, with or without regurgitation. Note that birds in new or stressful situations may not eat for a short period of time. Introducing new foods may cause a change in feces, and food with high water content may cause increased wet dropping from urine production. Conditions requiring veterinary care include long-term (greater than 8 hours in small birds, 24 hours in large birds) anorexia, diarrhea (lack of formation to fecal stools), passing whole seed in stool, decreased fecal output, or yellow to green urates (white portion of droppings).
4. **TISSUE PROLAPSE** from vent may be the uterus, rectum, intestines, oviduct/egg or other tissue. It is recommended to contact a veterinarian immediately, as delayed care can be detrimental. If care must be delayed, you may lightly rinse the tissue with warm, sterile saline solution or contact lens solution, and moisten with sterile lubricant, such as KY jelly. Do not use any petroleum-based lubricants as these will inhibit treatment and may create complications.

5. **CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM DISEASE** includes seizures, paralysis and/or incoordination. Weakness and/or seizure may be due to hypoglycemia. If the bird is alert you may give a small amount of karo or pancake syrup in water and call the veterinarian. There are few cases where neurological disease does not require immediate care.
6. **HYPERTHERMIA** or overheating from exposure to extreme heat or exertion can quickly be life threatening. Signs of hyperthermia include rapid breathing, panting and holding wings away from the body, collapse, and unresponsiveness. Be aware panting can also be caused by respiratory disease, and treating for hyperthermia can make situations worse. Birds that are hyperthermic can be cooled by gentle application of cool water.
7. **RESPIRATORY DISEASE** symptoms include difficulty breathing, sneezing, panting, rapid breathing, holding the wings away from the body with each breath, nasal discharge, a tail flick, or a voice change. If the bird has severe difficulty breathing, place the bird in a dark box or carrier, minimize handling and stress and call the veterinarian immediately.
8. **SWELLINGS** may be abdominal fluid, an egg, a hernia, air from a ruptured air sac or a tumor. If the bird exhibits difficulty breathing, or otherwise seems depressed call the veterinarian immediately, but any swelling indicates that medical care should be sought out.
9. **ANIMAL BITES** always require medication, even if you are not sure if the skin was broken. All animals carry bacteria in their mouth (cats are the worst) and many of these cause lethal infections in birds within a day. Wash wounds and flush with water if veterinary care is delayed, but seek care immediately.
10. **BEAK INJURIES** may or may not be emergencies depending on the extent and the location of injury. Fractures through, or injuries near where the beak is connected to the face should be seen as soon as possible. Bleeding should be controlled with direct pressure.

~ A note on the ADR bird (Ain't Doing Right):

Typical calls to our clinic involve birds that are "maybe a little lethargic, sometimes diarrhea, not eating as well as normal, just a little puffed up and sleeping more". Practically every disease a bird can have, mild or severe can present with these exact symptoms. As birds are masters at hiding signs of illness, we recommend an exam for any "ADR" bird, along with testing and laboratory work to help us distinguish between the many possible diagnoses.

~ To reach the veterinarian for **after hours** emergencies:

Call the regular clinic number: 425-486-9000. The recording will give instructions on how to reach the doctor on call. Cell phones and pagers don't always work the first time, so please try again if you get no response in 15-20 minutes. Do not call a doctor's pager or cell phone before checking the recording, as the number to reach the doctor on call may change.