



How to Take Care of a Cockatiel

Cockatiels are a very popular domestic bird species in the UK. They are happy, social and intelligent birds. When you decide that a cockatiel is for you, be prepared that you are taking on all the potential behaviour and health problems than can accompany your bird. There are many more facets to caring for a cockatiel than meets the eye.

Whether you are considering a cockatiel as a pet, or have recently become an owner, the guide below will help take you through the basics of cockatiel care.

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Cockatiel Cages

When it comes to their home, it is best to invest in the largest cage you can afford. If your bird will be out of its cage the majority of the day, then a smaller cage is acceptable. However, cockatiels are ground feeders by nature, so a cage with a large floor space would be ideal; just make sure you install a grate across the bottom so they don't eat their own droppings.

Cages should also always be purchased with safety in mind. Remember, a cage is going to house your bird for the majority of its life. Therefore, investing in something of greater quality is a necessary expense in regards to quality of life for your cockatiel.

Many assume that a parakeet or budgie cage is suitable for a cockatiel. However, the size is inadequate and cockatiel beaks will destroy the plastic-coated and flimsy wire bars. High-quality stainless steel or powder coated cages are best.



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Often, when you go up in cage sizes, the bar spacing also increases. As a rule, a cockatiel cage for a single cockatiel should be no less than 24" x 24" x 24" and bar spacing should be no more than 5/8".

Perches for Your Cockatiel

Providing a mixture of perches is best for your cockatiel. Your cockatiel relies on its feet during everything it does, even sleeping, so maintaining good foot health is important. Varying diameters of perch made of different materials will help exercise your cockatiel's feet. If using natural perches, make sure the wood is safe and from trees which have never been treated.

Your cockatiel will have a favourite sleeping perch. You will be able to distinguish which one this is by the pile of droppings underneath. It is worth noting that this will be your cockatiel's launching place during night frights. For this reason, have partial perches on the opposite side of the cage and do not have toys nearby that your bird could get tangled in.

Toys

Cockatiels have extremely strong beaks and they love to use them! Chewing is their favourite hobby and having plenty of toys they can shred to pieces will please them. Toys made from palm or raffia strips, twig balls, and vegetable tanned leather strips are all great options. Just like bigger bird breeds, cockatiels love toys made of wood and ice lolly sticks and balsa wood toys are a favourite.

Whether your cockatiel is inside or outside the cage, they will need opportunities to forage. Wild cockatiels are expert foragers and domestic birds have not lost this natural instinct. This will be a great source of exercise for your cockatiel, whilst keeping them mentally stimulated too.

Cockatiels will be pleased with anything they can swing on, climb on, or gnaw to smithereens. It is important to rotate toys to keep your cockatiel's mind active.

COCKATIEL DIET

What can Cockatiels eat?



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Along with regular exercise, Cockatiels need a good balanced diet to remain fit and healthy.

In their native Australia, they eat a variety of seeds (grass seeds), fresh and dry nuts, berries and vegetation. The UK has a different type of grass, but Cockatiels can still be fed a seed diet along with fruit, vegetables and occasionally human food.

Should I feed my Cockatiel pellets or seeds?

At least two-thirds of a Cockatiel's diet will include seeds or pellets. The rest should be made up of various fresh food.

Some owners prefer seeds because they seem more natural. However, it's important to understand that seeds are lacking in calcium and vitamins. An all-seed diet cannot provide Cockatiels with everything they need in their diet.

This helps explain the popularity of supplements which give Cockatiels the calcium they need. Most vets accept that modern pellets are formulated to give the correct amount of minerals and vitamins for birds and many owners prefer pellets for this reason.

If you buy a Cockatiel from a reputable breeder, he or she will share advice on what to feed them. If your breeder was feeding principally seeds and you want to convert to pellets, you can do that with support from an expert. A just weaned hand fed chick will adapt to pellets more easily than a mature bird.

What fruit and vegetables can Cockatiels eat?

- Apples
- Apricots
- Banana



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- Blackberries
- Cherries (not the pit)
- Coconut
- Dates
- Damsons
- Figs
- Grapes (with caution as they have a lot of sugar)
- Grapefruit
- Kiwi
- Melon (all types)
- Pears
- Pineapple
- Plums
- Pomegranates
- Peaches
- Raspberry
- Mango
- Melons
- Nectarines
- Strawberries

Vegetables

- Asparagus
- Beans (cooked includes lentils, brown rice, quinoa)
- Brussel sprouts
- Cabbage all types
- Carrots and their tops
- Chinese vegetables (bok choy)
- Corn (preferred on cob)
- Courgettes
- Cucumber
- Kale
- Parsnips
- Peas (especially still in pod)
- Peppers (red/green & hot)



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- Potatoes (prefer cooked)
- Pumpkin
- Spinach (in moderation)
- Squash
- Sweet potato and yams (cockatiels prefer cooked)

Sprouting seeds and legumes

Sprouting seeds is a popular option to feed Cockatiels a healthy and nutritional meal.

In the wild, they feast on freshly harvested pods, nuts, fruits, legumes, flowers and seeds. These can be described as live foods. When kept in captivity, foods eaten by birds are primarily processed or bought a few days after harvest.

Sprouting seeds helps replicate this natural diet. It involves burning off the fat found in seeds that gives them the energy to turn into plants. Once the fat is burned off, they're transformed into live, highly nutritious food - beneficial for many birds. They're especially valuable during the winter when good fresh vegetables are in short supply.

Sprouting is easy to learn and can help save money. Using basic equipment such as an electric sprouts along with organic sprout mix, will let you begin kitchen farming immediately.

Other natural food

For pet owners who enjoy walks in the great outdoors, you can find lots of nutritious foods that are good for Cockatiels. Dandelions, chickweed, dock, and young nettles are good options. Berries that garden birds eat like cotoneaster, hawthorn can also be enjoyed by Cockatiels.

What can Cockatiels not eat?



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Certain types of food are bad for all birds. Owners should avoid feeding birds:

- Alcohol
- Avocado
- Chocolate
- High fat
- High salt foods

Processed foods generally contain additives that are not healthy for avian species. If your Cockatiel flies down to your plate and flies off with a slice of cake, pizza or potato, this behaviour should not be encouraged; but it's unlikely they will suffer serious ill health by eating one piece of unsuitable food.

If you want to reward your Cockatiel with a treat whilst training them, it's best to give them food they really want. Recommended treats include: a sliver of nut, peanuts or sunflower.

Cockatiel Health and Safety

The cockatiel is a hardy little bird and, sadly, the majority of common illnesses in the species are owner-related. Poor diet, lack of exercise and an unclean cage are all the responsibility of the owner and preventative measures should be put in place to keep your cockatiel happy and healthy.

As a cockatiel owner, you should encourage active play and interaction. The cage and all its components (perches, water bowls, toys etc.) should be regularly cleaned and free of decaying food. This will keep bacteria levels down and illnesses at bay. It also creates a much nicer environment for your cockatiel to play in and get the valuable exercise they need.

Lots of cockatiel owners let their bird out of the cage regularly. Intelligent cockatiels really enjoy exploring the home. However, they will usually make their way to the floor due to their ground foraging tendencies. It is best to be alert when your



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cockatiel is out and about. The floor is home to electrical cords, other pets and large feet, which can be dangerous. If you intend on having your cockatiel out most of the time, remember to keep an eye on them and make sure doors and windows are closed.

As a cockatiel owner, you will need to be aware of chronic egg laying if you have a female. Cockatiels in captivity will reproduce year after year. Chronic egg laying can become a health hazard for the hen as her own calcium supply becomes depleted with each egg produced. This increases the possibility of egg binding, a condition in which the female is unable to pass the egg.

All cockatiels love their sleep and need 10 to 12 hours every night. A condition unique to the species is night frights. Night frights are not experienced by all cockatiels, but are common. This is usually experienced by cockatiels in the middle of the night when the house is quiet. Something as simple as a draft through the house or headlights of a passing car can send your cockatiel into a state of utter fear.

Often, cockatiels will try to take flight and fall to the bottom of their cage. If your cockatiel experiences a night fright, quickly turn on the light and reassure your bird. Usually your cockatiel will go peacefully back to sleep shortly afterwards but do keep an eye on any injuries your bird may have obtained during their panic.

Many owners keep a night light on in whichever room their bird sleeps. Also, the noise of a fan or air purifier is said to keep cockatiels calm at night.

Training

Cockatiels are intelligent birds and the most important thing you can do is train your bird to step up. Many owners teach this as the first command to their bird. To begin training, simply press your fingers gently up under the chest of your cockatiel, in front of the feet. Whilst doing this say 'up' or 'step up'. Repeating this command and practising regularly will quickly teach your bird the desired outcome when you say up or step up.

It is essential that when you train your cockatiel you use positive reinforcement.



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Bathing

Cockatiels enjoy bathing and sometimes even like showering with their owners. You can purchase special perches for this or many will happily sit on the shower rod. Bathing will keep your cockatiel's skin moist and feathers clean. Furthermore, cockatiels are dusty birds and showering will help keep this at bay. Some owners also use a mister, a shallow dish of water, or the kitchen sink.

Cockatiels can live up to 25 years old, so be prepared for your bird to be a valued and loved member of the family for a long time. Given the right care, nutrition, and environment, your cockatiel can remain healthy and have a happy life. If you are ever worried or in doubt about your cockatiels behaviour or health, make an appointment with your vet immediately.