

Caring for your budgerigar

How to keep pet budgies healthy and happy



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Are budgies right for me?

The friendly budgerigar (or budgies as they are mostly known), make excellent pets that are hardy, easily cared for and full of character. They are also easy to tame and can be taught to talk and whistle.

Budgies are perfect as a first pet bird and are suitable for children, provided they are handled with supervision at all times.

Young birds are much easier to tame and male birds are the most talkative. As single birds, they make good companions and will enjoy interacting with you. They can live up to 10 years if well looked after.

Choosing a new pet budgie

When selecting your budgie, check these signs that he is healthy:

- Bright and alert
- Clear eyes and nostrils
- Clean vent
- Feathers flush to the body
- Steady breathing
- Active, free movement
- Firm beak with no cracks
- Healthy claws and feet

The first few days

Your new bird's cage should be set up before you bring him home.

When you get him home, carefully place him in the cage and then leave him alone to adjust to his new surroundings.

When placed in his new cage, your budgie will start to explore, firstly to locate his food and water. If he's struggling, put a little seed on the floor of the cage to help him find the seed cups.

Millet sprays are good to have in his cage from the beginning, as they will settle him down while he gets used to his new environment.



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Creating a happy home

Your budgie's cage should be as large as possible and rectangular in shape to allow him maximum space for flight. The cage bars should be horizontal to allow your budgie to climb.

When choosing where your cage should go, a draught-free position where there is a constant temperature is ideal. Avoid window sills as they can become very hot in the afternoon and cold at night. Kitchens are generally unsuitable because they can become hot or smoky.

In the evening, cover the cage with a thin sheet/towel as this will make your bird feel safe at night and protect him from draughts.

Perches should have slightly different diameters (around 15mm) to exercise your bird's feet. Place them close to food and water with another one higher up for roosting.

Budgies need to preen to keep their feathers in good condition. They need a bird bath in their cage for a few hours when the room is warm, preferably early in the day when he has time to dry before night time. Alternatively, lightly spray him with a houseplant atomiser.



A healthy diet and treats

Budgies need plenty of fresh water and it should be changed daily - twice a day in hot weather.

A healthy, varied diet would be:

- Mixed budgie seed forms the basis of a good diet. Grit must also be available to help proper digestion of the seed.
- Budgies enjoy fresh produce such as apple, orange, grated carrot and salad greens and also garden weeds such as chickweed, groundsel and dandelion. Always remove any fresh items from the cage after a few hours to prevent the cage from becoming soiled. Never feed avocado or chocolate as these are poisonous to birds.
- A piece of cuttlefish bone will provide vital calcium and keep his beak well-trimmed.
- An iodine block will also supply necessary minerals.

He needs a balanced diet of mixed elements, over feeding fresh fruit and vegetables causes a risk of diarrhoea.

Treat him now and then with millet spray and treat sticks to keep him busy while you are out of the house.

Getting to know you

You can start training your budgie to talk almost straight away. Ensure the room is quiet with no other distractions. When he is familiar with you, encourage your budgie to come onto your finger by gently putting your hand in his cage and placing your forefinger alongside the perch whilst offering a favourite treat.

Teaching budgies to talk takes a lot of patience and some birds never learn. Maintaining eye contact and constantly repeating one simple word (e.g. his name) is a good way to start. Try to wait until this word has been mastered before attempting another word. Each training session should last no more than 20 minutes but can be repeated after an hour or so. Avoid keeping a mirror in the cage if you want to train your budgie to talk as he will end up talking to himself and therefore won't mimic you.

Exercise your budgie needs

Budgies like to play to stop them getting too bored. Keep toys to a minimum (one or two) to allow your budgie maximum room to move. Move the toys around occasionally or swap them out to keep his interest.

It is important that your budgie comes out of his cage regularly. Ensure there are no fires or potential hazards and that any poisonous plants are removed. Dogs or cats should not be present while your bird is loose.

Budgies and other pets

Budgies will live happily together in a pair, or two males or two females can be kept together if introduced into the cage at the same time while they are young. Budgies are playful, sociable characters and are happiest with company of their own species.

Budgie gender

A young hen's cere will be blue and white which develops to a brown crusty cere, whereas a young cock bird will have a pinkish purple cere which turns blue with maturity.

The cere is the waxy part above his beak.

Younger birds are harder to identify as the cere stays a pinkish blue colour until 12 weeks in either sex.

You can distinguish a young budgie by the barred pattern on their plumage stretching from the cere over the forehead. Mature birds don't have that plumage and their eyes have a white iris whereas budgies younger than 14 weeks have a solid black colouration of the eyes.



Potential health issues with budgies

Enteritis

Signs that there is a problem with your budgie's digestive system include lethargy and a change of colour in their droppings. If kept with other birds, isolate him and seek veterinary advice.

Sour Crop

This is usually found in female birds in breeding condition which have not bred. She will retch and you may notice mucus on her head. If spotted, seek veterinary advice.

Egg binding

Occasionally eggs can become stuck in the egg tract and you may see the hen straining as she tries to lay the egg, your budgie should be taken to a vet straight away.

Mites

Birds with feather mites will appear restless, more so at night when the mites are most active. They can also suffer from anemia due to the blood loss.

Treat the bird, cage and any nest boxes with a suitable mite spray but if the problem persists, seek veterinary advice.

Pet insurance for your budgie

Budgies can be insured under plans for small birds, however, it may not be possible to find an insurance plan specifically tailored to budgies.

Your new pet checklist

- Cage and cover
- Sand sheets
- Bird bath
- Budgie seed
- Grit
- Cuttlefish bone
- Cage wipes and disinfectant
- Mineral block
- Millet sprays
- Vitamins
- Toys



Help and further advice

If you have any questions about caring for your pet, our fully trained team are happy to help if they can, or advise on where to find more specialist information.

Whilst there is a wealth of information available online, only a professional will be able to correctly answer your query. If in doubt, call your local vet for an appointment.

It is against the law to release, or allow to escape, non-native animals or birds. If you have trouble caring for any animals contact our team for advice.



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