

My cockatiel is 15 years old. I guess that is getting old for a cockatiel. How can I tell if he gets sick?

A well-cared for cockatiel who has been fed a nutritious diet could easily live to be 20 or more. Fortunately your bird hasn't been ill until this point, but pet birds are masters at hiding illness until it may be too late to help them. In order to try to avoid being singled out by a predator, they are genetically programmed to not show signs of disease if they can avoid it. As your bird's guardian, you need to be observant and know what is normal for your bird, so you'll be aware of any changes. Normal, healthy birds spend most of their time on their perch. If you see your bird sitting on the floor of the cage, or he doesn't have the energy to perch for very long, those are problems. Watch for how your bird breathes normally. If your bird's tail is bobbing up and down with each breath, his nostrils look clogged or you hear noises with each breath, those all warrant a visit to his doctor. If he normally sings or talks and becomes quieter than usual that could be another problem.

Be aware of your bird's normal appetite. You should have a good idea of how much your bird normally eats and watch for a decrease in appetite as a warning sign. When you clean your bird's cage, take note of roughly how many droppings there are per day and what they look like. Fewer droppings could mean he isn't eating well. Each dropping should have a darker center that is the fecal matter. It should be solid, so if it becomes loose, your bird may have diarrhea. There should also be a solid white portion known as urates and a clear watery part that is urine. If any of the three portions of the droppings change, consult your veterinarian.

In addition to the above subtle signs of illness, we probably don't need to mention obvious signs. Don't ignore abnormal feather loss, an overgrown or crooked beak, a drooping wing, or inability to use a foot. With birds it is not a good idea to "give it a few days". Get help for your bird before it is too late.

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