**YVCipedia AVIAN**

Cockatiel Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Cockatiels are small, expressive parrots native to Australia, known for their distinctive crests, whistling abilities, and affectionate personalities. Often described as the “gentle companion” of the parrot world, they are one of the most popular avian pets—and for good reason.

At YVC, we find cockatiels to be wonderfully balanced pets for both first-time bird owners and seasoned avian keepers. Their lifespan typically ranges from **15–25 years**, and with regular interaction and veterinary care, many live long, healthy lives.

## **Housing & Environment**

While smaller than many parrots, cockatiels are **active flyers** and benefit from room to stretch their wings—even inside their cage. We recommend a **minimum cage size of 24"x18"x24"** with **½-inch bar spacing**, though larger is always better.

Cockatiels use their beaks and feet to climb, so include **horizontal bars** if possible. Natural wood perches of varying diameter help maintain healthy feet and avoid pressure sores. We encourage placing perches to allow short flights and avoid constant wing clipping unless medically necessary.

Position the cage in a quiet but social area of your home—away from drafts, cooking fumes, or loud, sudden noises. Cockatiels are light-sensitive and need a **consistent day-night cycle**, with **10–12 hours of uninterrupted dark sleep** in a quiet room or covered cage.

## **Diet & Nutrition**

A proper diet is one of the most critical parts of cockatiel health. Seed-only diets, while traditional, lead to malnutrition and shortened lifespans. At YVC, we routinely see preventable issues like **vitamin A deficiency, obesity, and hepatic lipidosis** in birds on poor diets.

We recommend building the diet around **high-quality pelleted foods**, such as **Mazuri, Roudybush, or Harrison’s**, which should make up about **60–70% of the daily intake**. To keep meals interesting and nutrient-dense, offer:

* **Fresh vegetables**: leafy greens, bell peppers, squash, carrots
* **Occasional fruits**: apple, banana, berries (2–3 times/week)
* **Whole grains and cooked legumes** in small portions

While we sometimes recommend **Lafeber Nutri-Berries or AviCakes** as training treats or enrichment, these should not replace pellets.

Fresh, clean water should be changed at least once daily. Avoid offering avocado, onion, garlic, chocolate, caffeine, and anything sugary or salty.

## **Behavior & Handling**

Cockatiels are curious, gentle, and often bond deeply with their caregivers. They tend to be less demanding than larger parrots but still benefit from **daily interaction and mental stimulation**.

At YVC, we frequently counsel owners on understanding the difference between affection and overstimulation. Many cockatiels enjoy **head scratches, shoulder time, and gentle whistling conversations**, but may nip if pushed too far or startled.

Males are often more vocal and may learn to mimic sounds or short phrases. Females are generally quieter but just as interactive and intelligent.

## **Enrichment**

To stay healthy, cockatiels need both mental and physical enrichment. Even if they don’t perform complex tricks, they thrive on variety and attention.

Try offering:

* **Rotating toys** that include shreddable paper, wood, or soft rope
* **Mirrors or bells**, especially for single birds, but monitor for obsessive behaviors
* **Whistling games** and gentle vocal interaction
* **Training sessions** using positive reinforcement—target training or step-ups are great starters
* **Safe out-of-cage time**, ideally daily, in a bird-proofed room

Cockatiels are particularly prone to boredom and loneliness if left isolated without stimulation.

## **Health & Veterinary Care**

Annual avian wellness exams are the foundation of preventative care. At YVC, we strongly recommend routine **physical exams, weight tracking, bloodwork, and gram stains** to monitor early signs of illness—especially since cockatiels often **mask symptoms** until disease is advanced.

### **Common Health Concerns**

* **Feather destructive behavior (plucking)** due to stress or underlying illness
* **Nutritional deficiencies** from seed-heavy diets
* **Respiratory infections**, especially from dusty or dirty cages
* **Reproductive disorders**, including chronic egg-laying or egg-binding
* **Psittacosis (Chlamydia psittaci)**, a zoonotic bacterial infection

Seek veterinary care promptly if your bird shows signs of lethargy, fluffed feathers, tail bobbing, nasal discharge, reduced appetite, or vocalization changes.

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Cockatiels often live 20+ years with good care
* Males typically whistle more; females may be more prone to chronic egg-laying
* They use their crests to express mood—flattened for fear, upright for alertness
* Cockatiels produce feather dust (powder down), which may trigger allergies in sensitive individuals
* They can be kept singly if given ample attention, but some do better in pairs

## **Supplies Checklist**

* Minimum 24"x18"x24" cage with horizontal bars
* Perches of natural wood or rope (varying diameter)
* Pelleted diet with daily fresh veggies
* Treats: Nutri-Berries or AviCakes in moderation
* Shreddable and interactive toys
* Bird-safe water and food dishes
* Full-spectrum lighting or access to indirect sunlight
* Travel carrier for vet visits
* Avian-safe disinfectants for routine cleaning
* Cuttlebone or mineral block for beak conditioning and calcium

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*