Budgerigar Care Sheet

What Your Budgie Is Used to Eating

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|  | Finch Seed Mix |
|  | Kaytee Exact Pellets for Cockatiels |
|  | Carrots |
|  | Collard Greens |
|  | Oranges |
|  | Canary Seed Mix |
|  | Oat Groats |
|  | Higgins Snack Attack Protein Egg Food |
|  | Purina Flock Raiser (Poultry Crumbles) |
|  | Millet |
|  | Other Pellets (Zupreem Fruit Blend for Parakeets) |

Basic Needs for Caring For Your Budgie

**Cage.**  This must be wide enough for your budgie to fly from side to side. The smallest size I recommend is 24" wide by 18" deep. Any cage that has a 13" dimension is too small. Buy the largest size cage you can afford, and keep in mind that budgies don't fly straight up and down, but side to side. Therefore wider is better than taller.

Also, if a cage looks too small to house two budgies in, then it is also too small to house one budgie. In other words, just because you only have one budgie doesn't mean you can use a cage that is half the size. A budgie by itself requires the same amount of space that two budgies require. If your budgie's cage is too small, it **must** be allowed plenty of free flying time outside of its cage during the day.

Make sure that the **bar spacing** on your cage is no larger than **half an inch**. Many large cages are meant for bigger birds, so they have 3/4 inch spacing or wider. A budgie can get its head through the wider spaces and either escape, or be caught and strangled. So search for *large* cages for *small* birds. Searching for finch cages will also work, as those need close bar spacing as well.

Another thing to avoid is a cage with fancy roof lines. Simple rectangles or dome tops are best. Victorian peaks and odd shapes carve up your bird's flying space, making it harder for him to get around. They also make it difficult to place perches, toys and feeding dishes. Their other drawback is that it is hard to catch a bird that is sitting up high in a tiny corner, if it becomes necessary. Especially if the door to the cage is very small and at the bottom.

**Perches.** It is good exercise for your budgie's feet to have several different thicknesses and textures of perches. The ones that come with cages are usually too thin, but that is OK, as long as you provide other sizes in addition. It is not good for a budgie to stand for its whole life on one size of perch. Natural branches also make good perches, as long as they are thoroughly cleaned and dried first.

**Food and Water cups.** These are usually provided with the cage, but replacements and extras are available in stores. My preference for water is a tube-style drinker, as that style seems to collect less dirt and debris than an open bowl. When the water gets dirty, it must be changed so as not to make your budgie sick.

**Parakeet Formula Seed and Pellets.** There is a debate about whether a bird seed or a pellet diet is better for caged birds. I feed my birds both. You will go through a lot more seed than pellet, though, because most birds don't really eat the pellets as much. If you buy your bird a seed mix that contains pellets, and she won't eat them, then you will end up throwing half the bag away, and buying seed more often. It's cheaper to purchase your seeds and pellets separately.

 It is also important to feed your budgie **fresh vegetables**. All types of **greens** and lettuces that you find in a store are good, but feed only the green part. White lettuces and celery contain too much water. **Carrots and other orange** vegetables are also important. Scrub or rinse all vegetables to help minimize your bird's exposure to pesticides. Frozen vegetables that are thawed first may also be used.

Never feed your parakeet junk food, or anything high in fats and sugars. But almost every healthy food you eat, your budgie can also eat. The exceptions are: alcohol, apple seeds, avocado, chocolate and onions. These are toxic to budgies. Small amounts of meat are ok, but dairy isn't really useful to birds.

When giving fresh foods to your budgie, make sure they don't sit in his cage long enough to spoil. Depending on the type of food, it can be left for a whole day, or it may need to be removed within an hour or two.

**Toys.** Your budgie needs at least a few of these, to keep herself entertained. On the other extreme, too many toys can clutter up the cage and reduce her room for exercise. A good compromise is to rotate the extra toys in and out every week or two, so that your budgie doesn't get tired of the same toys day in and day out.

A word about **mirrors**: Budgies prefer to live in flocks. In the absence of other budgies, your pet will either turn to you as a flock mate, or to his **own reflection**. For this reason, I recommend **no** mirrors, and **no shiny, reflective toys**. These things will hinder his ability to bond with you as his primary friend and companion. And more importantly for your budgie, these things will not respond to him as another live bird would, and it will be a source of frustration, possibly causing him to be upset, and behave badly. Mirrors can mess with their minds and drive them crazy. They will also guard their friend in the mirror, and chase you away from it. Sometimes you can get away with a mirror, but why tempt fate? If your budgie develops a problem, get rid of the mirror. But better yet, avoid the problem in the first place.

It is also important that you spend a good deal of time interacting with your budgie, since without another bird, she will be lonely. If you find you cannot give her the attention she deserves, than either another home, or another parakeet to keep her company, may be in order.

If you have more than one parakeet, then mirrors are no longer an issue, because your bird will receive his companionship from his cage mate, and the two of them can enjoy all the shiny reflective things you wish to give them. (Unless the two of them fight over the "friend" in the mirror.)

Settling Your Budgie Into Its New Home

**Arriving Home.** Try to have your budgie's cage ready before you bring her home. That way she won't have to wait in the travel box for too long. The easiest way to transfer from the box to cage is if the box can fit through the door, and then you can open the box and let her come out on her own. Often this isn't possible, so you will have to pick her up to move her. Try to do this with as little fuss as possible, and try to prevent her from getting loose. Having to chase her around the room just adds to her stress, especially if her wings have not been clipped.

**Cover the cage.** The first few days in his new home, your budgie will be quite nervous. He will be more comfortable if you cover the back and sides of his cage, so that he feels protected. Each day you can fold back the cover a little more, until your budgie gets used to having the cage completely open.

Try not to hover too much, if you think your budgie feels intimidated. But do talk to her frequently and cheerfully, so she gets used to your presence. Taming lessons should only begin after she is relaxed and you see that she has begun eating. Taming can be a little stressful, and she needs to be eating enough to keep up her strength first.

**Eating.** Don't expect your budgie to eat very much the first two days. He will probably just sit in one spot on a perch and never move. As he gets over his fright, he will start to explore his new home. You will be able to tell when he starts to eat, because there will be empty seed husks in his food dish. If you don't see any, try blowing on the seed, and the husks should fly up. It also helps to give him some spray millet, clipped to the bars of his cage near the spot where he sits the most. He will usually eat this before he is willing to risk going near the seed dish.

**Poops.** Try not to worry about your budgie's lack of eating unless it goes on beyond the first few days. If your budgie is eating normally, she will have normal poops. If she doesn't eat for a couple of days, expect her poops to become soft and runny. This is a sign that she is not eating. Later, when your budgie is used to her environment, runny poops will be a sign to you that she is ill. In a normal, healthy budgie that is eating properly, the poops will be small and circular with a white area in the center. The color is usually black, but anywhere from green to brown is common, depending on what she has been eating.

**Feeding.** Until your budgie is relaxed and cheerful in his new home, you will need to perform feeding and cleaning chores with as little fuss as possible, in a calm manner. Fresh foods can wait a few days, since he probably won't be eating anything anyway. Likewise, there will be little need for changing food and water, or cleaning up any poops. When this does become necessary, just do it in a matter of fact way, not rushing, but not taking any longer than necessary. Eventually the two of you will be used to each other's movements, and you won't have to give this another thought. But for now, the bird needs to learn to trust you, and not be terrorized when you reach into the cage.

A Few Safety Essentials

**Quarantine.** When bringing home a new bird, it is important to keep it away from any birds you already own for a period of at least four weeks. This gives you time to make sure that the new bird is not carrying any illnesses or parasites that can be transferred to your old birds. It also gives your new bird some time to adjust to her new surroundings before she is exposed to any germs that your old birds have, but which they are immune to. The new bird might not be immune to these germs, and the stressfulness of moving into a new home may cause her to succumb to disease. Stress can cause illness in budgies.

It's important to note, that if your new bird and your old bird *do* happen to find their way to each other, it doesn't mean that quarantine is ruined and can be abandoned. One brief meeting does not transfer germs as readily as living together in close quarters. The same goes for people who put their birds together when they got home, only to discover about quarantine a day or two later. The birds can still be separated, and if one of them *does* happen to develop symptoms during the rest of the quarantine period, you will be glad that you have minimized the risk to the other one.

**Chemical Fumes.** Budgies have very sensitive respiratory systems. Therefore, odors and fumes that don't bother you, could be extremely harmful to your pet. Anything that gives off a strong odor is also giving off fumes. Some of these things include: scented candles, cleaning products, cigarette smoke, any aerosol sprays, and perfume, to name a few. The rule of thumb, if the scent is strong to you, it is way too strong for your budgie. Birds don't just have lungs. They have air sacs that permeate their whole bodies. They small body weights cannot tolerate what we can tolerate.

If you can't replace your cleaning products with unscented ones, then to prevent them from harming your budgie, move his cage to a safe, fume-free area on cleaning day.

**Non-stick cookware.** Any type of household cookware or appliances that have non stick coating may be potentially deadly to your budgerigar. In theory, these things are only harmful when they are overheated, and give off fumes. But in some studies, small amounts of chemicals were found to be released into the air during normal usage.

Be aware that many household items besides pans have Teflon in them. These include some hair dryers, clothing irons, and many electric kitchen appliances. It is up to you to decide whether to use these items or not, but if you do use them, make sure your budgie's cage is not too close to them, and make sure there is adequate ventilation. If your budgie is accidentally exposed to toxic fumes, open windows, turn on fans, and do everything you can to clear the air in your budgie's room.

**Ceramic cookware.** In 2012 I started hearing about nonstick cookware that uses ceramic, instead of chemicals. (Sometimes called "Green" pans.) These don't appear to have any harmful properties at all. I got one to try, and it works great. Most of my pans are stainless steel, but for people who can't give up their non stick, I highly recommend the new ceramic pans.

**Houseplants.** Some are toxic, some are safe, and budgies love to chew on them. Either keep your budgies away from all plants, or find out which ones are safe, and only let your budgie near those.

**Water.** Budgies can drown. Therefore, make sure your budgie's water dish is not large or deep. Or, use a tube style drinker. If you provide your budgie with a birdbath, make sure it, too, is not deep. Bird baths with non-slippery bottoms are best, so that your budgie won't lose her footing and slip underwater.

Other sources of dangerous water to budgies are open toilets, fish tanks, open beverages, dishes soaking with water in them, dish pans of sudsy water (which might appear to your bird as a safe landing surface), and pots of water cooking on the stove. When your bird is enjoying his out of cage flying time, make sure there are no liquids around that he can accidentally fall into. (Or hot stove tops he can get burned on.)

**Gaps Behind and below Furniture.** Tall book cases, pianos, and refrigerators are notorious places for a budgerigar to make its way behind, and then be unable to escape from. Don't let your budgie fly free in any room that has such a hazard. Budgies are known to panic and die of a heart attack when trapped in these small spaces. You may want to scan the room your budgie plays in for any openings that lead to small, closed off spaces, and make sure they are completely blocked.