

WHAT TO EXPECT IF YOUR BIRD HAS A FRACTURE

Introduction

Fractures are not uncommon in avian patients following trauma. A fracture may be classified as open, meaning the broken end of the bone has pierced the skin, or closed, meaning there is no disruption to the skin. Fractures may be managed with cage rest, splints, bandages, or surgery. The good news is that bird bones heal quickly, and depending upon the location of the fracture and age of the bird it can take anywhere from 2-7 weeks to heal.

Your avian veterinarian will initially provide pain relief, stabilization of the fracture and treatment of shock if required. Your bird may have wounds or other injuries that will also need to be assessed and treated. Your veterinarian will advise on the best treatment plan for your bird, prior to further investigations.

Diagnostics

Your veterinarian will usually take radiographs (x-rays), typically under sedation or general anesthesia, to assess the fracture and screen for any other injuries. Once a final diagnosis has been made, a treatment plan will be recommended. Whatever treatment is performed, your bird will be discharged with pain relief and possibly other medications (such as antibiotics), depending on the exact injury sustained.

Cage Rest

Cage rest is suitable for some fractures, such as those of the clavicle or coracoid (the shoulder girdle) bones. Your bird's cage may need to be modified to prevent injury, for example padding the bottom of the cage, lowering perches or using flat perches to assist balance. If a cage cannot be modified for a bird, providing a "hospital cage" that you have created at home will be necessary. You can find information on how to make a hospital cage on AAVs handout, "Making a Home Incubator for Your Pet Bird." No matter what set up you provide, make sure food and water is within easy reach for your bird.

Bandaging

For fractures of the bones of the wing a body wrap or figure of 8 bandage may be used. This bandage should be regularly replaced and physical therapy performed. Your veterinarian will discuss a schedule for reassessment to allow this to be done. For leg fractures various splints may be needed depending upon which bone is affected. A tape splint may be applied for smaller size birds with fractures of the tibiotarsus or tarsometatarsus. Large birds may require larger bandages, but surgery may also be needed for these individuals to have the best chance at a successful outcome. It is important that any bandage or splint is carefully monitored for swelling, slipping or chewing by your bird. Bandages and splints must also stay clean and dry. Contact your veterinarian immediately if you have any concerns about your bird's bandage. Your veterinarian will discuss a schedule for changing bandages for your bird.

Surgical Fixation

Surgical fixation involves placing pins into the bones to hold the fractured ends in alignment. This may be a simple pin, placed down the center of the bone, pins placed perpendicular to the bone or a combination of both. If a combination of both types of pins are used, an external bar may be present attaching both types to provide further support. This is called an external fixator. Most birds leave these fixation devices alone; however, a collar may be required if your bird interferes with the device. Any surgical wounds should be closely monitored for swelling or discharge and any concerns discussed with your veterinarian.

Aftercare

Whichever technique is used for treatment, the period immediately after any injury is stressful for your bird. They are getting used to changes in their mobility due to bandaging or surgical implants and they will be recovering from trauma and possible shock. Birds will require cage rest. As previously mentioned for cage rest, perches should be removed or lowered, to avoid falling. Shelf or flat perches may be preferred on a temporary basis. The bottom of the cage should be padded for comfort. Ensure food and water are accessible and can be eaten easily. Make sure your bird is still able to reach its food if it cannot use its feet to hold food items or if it has an Elizabethan-type collar on which could interfere with reaching food if the bowl is the incorrect size or shape to accommodate this. If your bird usually lives with a mate, they may need to be separated during initial healing. Medications should be administered according to the instructions from your veterinarian.



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Enrichment should be provided where appropriate to distract your bird from any wound, bandage or implant. This may be done by offering favorite treats or alternative items to chew, such as paper towel rolls, pine cones or branches.

The aim of treatment is to return your bird to normal function as soon as possible. Your veterinarian may recommend physical therapy to help with this. This is usually performed every 2-3 days at the start of treatment and often under anesthesia for the first few sessions. Discuss the options for this with your veterinarian.

Conclusion

In order to have the greatest chance at a successful outcome and return to normal function, it is very important to follow your avian veterinarian's recommendations. Make sure to offer medications, provide appropriate at-home set-ups, and follow up in the time frame that your veterinarian recommends. If there are any concerns or questions that arise make sure to reach out to your veterinarian for reassessment.

AAV: Setting a Standard in Avian Care Since 1980

Avian medicine is a distinct and very specialized field that requires extensive training, advanced skills, and facilities specifically designed and equipped to treat and hospitalize birds. The Association of Avian Veterinarians was established to provide veterinarians with this special education, and to keep them up to date with the latest information on bird health. The AAV holds an annual conference on avian medicine and publishes the peer-reviewed *Journal of Avian Medicine and Surgery*. AAV also makes annual contributions toward avian conservation and sponsors studies advancing the understanding of avian medicine.

For More Information

For more information on birds, ask your veterinarian for copies of the following AAV Client Education Brochures:

- Avian Chlamydiosis and Psittacosis
- Veterinary Care for Your Pet Bird*
- Basic Care for Companion Birds*
- Behavior: Normal and Abnormal
- Caring for Backyard Chickens
- Digital Scales
- Feather Loss
- Feeding Birds
- Injury Prevention and Emergency Care
- Managing Chronic Egg-laying in Your Pet Bird
- Signs of Illness in Companion Birds*
- Ultraviolet Lighting for Companion Birds
- When Should I Take My Bird to a Veterinarian?*
- Zoonotic Diseases in Backyard Poultry*

**Available in multiple languages. All others are available in English only at this time.*

Online Resources

Follow AAV on Facebook (www.facebook.com/aavonline) for great tips and the latest news for pet bird owners. You can also find us on Twitter, Instagram (@aavonline) and YouTube!

Our website, www.aav.org, offers a Find-a-Vet tool to help pet bird owners locate avian veterinarians around the world. We also offer a variety of resources such as basic bird care instructions and more. Visit the website today!