

AVIAN PHYSICAL THERAPY

Introduction

Physical therapy may be required after an injury or illness. The aim of physical therapy is to restore and maintain normal mobility and range of motion, to strengthen muscles and restore fitness. Always seek advice from your avian veterinarian regarding which techniques are most appropriate for your bird and stop if your bird shows any signs of discomfort or stress.

Massage

If your bird is used to being handled, gentle massage of the affected area can be performed. This is particularly useful for foot, toe and lower leg injuries. Massage toes and feet gently in an upwards direction by rolling them between your fingers. Vitamin E cream can be used to assist with this.

Passive Range of Motion

This is where a joint is gently flexed and extended through its normal range of motion. It is particularly useful for wing injuries to maintain the range of motion of the elbow and carpus. At first, your avian veterinarian may perform this under sedation or anesthesia, especially following a fracture. The treatment can then be continued at home when your veterinarian feels this is appropriate. Start by gently folding the wing until it is in a normal flexed position. Hold for 10-20 seconds. Then gently extend the limb to the level where resistance is first met. Again, hold for 10-20 seconds. This exercise is repeated several times (building up to 15-20 times per session). Initially, resistance may be met with flexion or extension of a given joint and a bird may not have full range of motion of that joint. With physical therapy, the joints range of motion should improve throughout the session. For example, a joint may not be able to fully extend at the start of physical therapy but with repetition of the above mentioned movements, that joint should be able to extend further by the end of the session. Frequency of physical therapy will be determined by your veterinarian, however it is usually recommended to perform the exercises once or twice per day.

Active Range of Motion

This is where a natural movement of the limb is encouraged. For example, your bird may be encouraged to stand on your hand or on a perch you are holding. The toes are gently held to keep the bird in position and the hand or perch is then gently lowered, causing the bird to flap its wings. This can be repeated several times. Care must be taken while performing this exercise to not let the bird fall or jump if startled.

For physical therapy of the legs, the bird again stands on the hand or a perch. The object upon which the bird is standing is gently rocked/rolled backwards and forwards to make the bird adjust

its grip and flex the feet. A balance ball covered with a towel can also be used for this – the ball is gently rolled back and forth with a human helper holding the ball securely. This is done to exercise the leg muscles.

Enrichment Activities

Enrichment provided to your bird can also help with physical therapy. Once your bird has built up strength and is able to flap their wings well, position foraging toys so they have to hang upside down and flap their wings/use their muscles to interact with them. Recall training with treats, over a gradually increasing flight distance will also help to build up muscle strength and fitness.

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.



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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!

