

loss in overweight cats should be gradual. It is highly recommended to feed your cat specific meals if possible, and to measure the food so that they have the same calorie intake each day. Tinned foods are far better than dry foods, and in particular having a diet high in protein is important (for example Hills® Prescription Diet m/d has been designed specifically for diabetic cats). Cats can be very fussy about their food, and don't necessarily eat what we want them to (even though it's for their own good!!). Consultation with your vet is vital to ensure that an ideal treatment plan is devised for each individual.

Diabetes generally is a disease which is readily treated and where Puss doesn't suffer from any loss in their quality of life. A reasonable number of cats can even come off their insulin treatment if underlying causes like obesity and/or illness are dealt with—but remember, once a diabetic, Puss always has that predisposition in future. Certainly, ensuring they maintain a healthy weight and have issues like dental disease addressed promptly helps to prevent diabetes from developing in the first place!



Bird and Exotics Vet

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Alex graduated from the University of Sydney in 1991. He achieved Membership of the Avian Health Chapter of the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists in 1996. In November 1996 he opened the first and only Sydney all bird and exotic pet practice. The Clinic moved to 1 Hunter St, Waterloo in 2003 and sees approximately 80% birds, and 20% fish, reptiles and other exotic pets. Alex is the current president of the Australian Veterinary Association Avian Group.

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Summer time, the festive season and your bird

Summer weather is now upon us. With it comes hot weather, holidays and the festive season.

Our birds love this time of year. They usually love the long warm days in daylight saving and the holiday period when we are often off work so we are more likely to be at home with them during daylight hours. There are also lots of fresh native plants and fruits around for them to chew on and play with.

However, there are many hazards at this time of year for our birds. Most parrots can live in very hot climates and our Australian natives often come from very dry hot areas of Australia. Yet in our hot, humid climate they may still overheat. Signs to look for are having the feathers sleek and flat (not fluffed up) on the body while the wings are outstretched fanning back and forth with very hard open-mouthed breathing. To avoid overheating, keep your birds inside on hot days and away from direct sunlight from windows. On hot days you should spray your bird several times a day with a fine mist of water—you can buy clean spray bottles from your local hardware store but make sure they've never been used to contain any other liquids.

Hot weather also means open windows. Our birds are meant to fly and will often head towards an open window or door. All birds, even those with clipped wings, find it easy to get lift and fly on a warm windy day. On such days try not to take your bird outside. If you do need to open the windows, it is best to place non-toxic fly screen mesh on doors and windows.

Try not to let your bird chew them, as even with the safer less toxic flyscreens, they will make holes in them and escape or ingest enough to still cause a problem.

Fans are a great way to keep our houses cool but they can be a potential hazard to many birds. Years ago I lived and worked in North Queensland and it was not uncommon to see birds that had been hit by fan blades. So when fans—especially unprotected ceiling fans—are turned on, your birds need to be safely in their cage.

The long days of summer, with many of us home, may mean long nights for birds. Many clients tell me their parrot stays up with them till they go to bed. Often in the festive season we are on holidays and this means we stay up even later than usual. It is great fun to spend time with your bird and your bird will love all the attention. However, birds need 10–14 hours restful sleep a day. Keeping a bird up late at night with not enough sleep has the same effect on them that it has on us but with more problems. They may become tired and cranky, play up more and have tantrums. Less sleep and decreased dark hours will make them moult (change their feathers) more often. This decreases their immune system. That, combined with lack of sleep, will make them more susceptible to diseases. The longer hours can also set off breeding behaviour and may lead to egg laying in hens. Birds that are breeding are often more demanding and aggressive and may exhibit cage guarding. To avoid all these problems cover your bird up with a dark cloth from at least 8.00pm till 7.00am.

During the holidays many of us may be away for a night or two. The weather

is hot and if your bird knocks over its food and water it may quickly dehydrate and small birds may start to starve. Leaving at night and coming back the next day may be okay, but if you are away for any longer make sure a friend or neighbour drops in to check on them. If you are going to leave your bird with a friend then make sure they are familiar with birds. If they have any birds of their own check their birds are healthy. Very often I see birds that although annually health checked at our clinic, come in with infectious diseases caught from another bird they were staying with. Make sure the other birds your bird comes in contact with have also been health checked by an avian veterinarian.

The festive season also brings for some people presents, decorations, toys and food. Some of these are hazardous to birds. Most metallic Christmas decorations are toxic to birds if eaten. Some of our favourite presents such as chocolate and certain flowers are also poisonous to birds. Even the things we celebrate with such as champagne cork wires and some metal foils on wine are extremely toxic to our birds. No year passes without me having to deal with a bird that has suffered poisoning from decorations or presents that were left lying around the house. They love shiny objects and will definitely be attracted to them and try to chew them.

During the holiday season many of us buy toys for our loved pet birds. A lot of toys, even some of those that claim to be bird safe, are not so safe. Avoid toys that have any metal objects, chains or ties on them. Try to stick to toys that are made of wood or solid plastic with only vegetable dyes for colouring. Better still, find some native plants for your bird to eat. Often we have time during the summer to search for grasses and native plants. Bottlebrush, grevilleas, gum tree and melaleuca (paper bark) trees all have flowers, leaves and branches that the birds love to chew. Pinecones, banksias and gum nuts give parrots more pleasure than most other toys. If you are unable to find or unsure which are safe native plants then you may now be able to buy them. Some of these native bush toys are now threaded together and available from bird suppliers. The more safe toys and native plant toys you have available, the less chance your birds are going to search out for other objects and decorations around the house to chew.

So enjoy the long summer days with your bird and keep them safe, healthy and entertained.



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