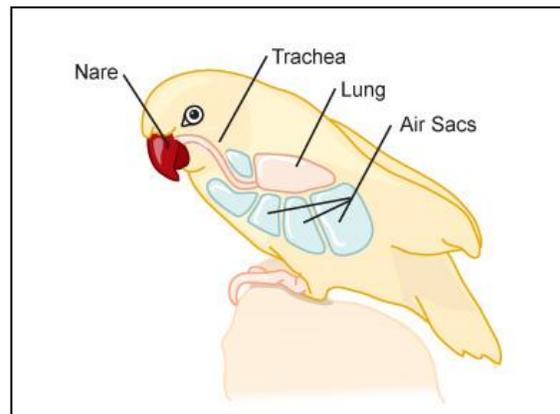


## ASPERGILLOSIS

Aspergillosis is a common cause of respiratory disease in pet birds. It can cause upper and lower respiratory problems or a more broadly distributed infections.

### **What is Aspergillosis?**

Aspergillus is the fungus that causes a disease called aspergillosis. It is a slow growing fungal infection that gradually damages tissues in the body over a period of weeks to months with little obvious evidence until an organ or system is severely compromised. Aspergillus is found everywhere, particularly in soil, nesting material and moldy foods.



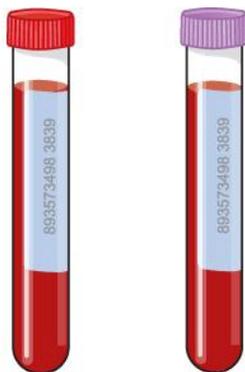
Aspergillus is normally an environmental contaminant and does not seem to be spread easily between birds. Often, other diseases that have compromised the birds immune system will predispose a bird to secondary Aspergillosis. Steroid use, long term antibiotic use, too much stress, poor husbandry or hygiene, respiratory irritants (such as cigarette smoke), viral infections and chronic infections can all cause immune suppression. It appears that birds on an all seed diet are prone to this disease. It is suspected that most healthy birds are regularly exposed to this fungus, but healthy ones do not get sick.

### **How do I know if my bird has Aspergillosis?**

Aspergillosis does not show any specific signs and may be undetectable by your veterinarian unless it is on the skin. There may be signs of respiratory difficulty, tail bobbing, or weight loss. The bird may be depressed, fluffed and listless. A veterinarian familiar with birds will start with a complete history, weight and a physical examination. Since many of the clinical signs are descriptive and are common to a lot of different diseases, diagnostic tests are advised.

### **What tests can be done?**

Many different tests may be employed if aspergillosis is suspected. Each test provides another piece of the puzzle and often multiple tests are needed to give more clarity.



A **complete blood count (CBC)** with a dramatic elevation in the white blood cells may initially raise suspicion of an Aspergillus infection. **X-rays** will usually only show subtle lesions in an advanced stage of disease. **Serology** tests

are available but can have false negative results. **DNA** tests will detect the presence of Aspergillus DNA. A **Tracheal wash** can illustrate the presence of the Aspergillus organism in the trachea or respiratory tract. The most accurate diagnostic technique is surgical **laparoscopy** in which a fiberoptic instrument is passed surgically into the bird to view the airsacs and lungs. Biopsies or samples of lesions are collected, and evaluated by **cytology** and **histology**. **Cultures** of the collected samples may grow the organism.

### ***Can my bird be treated?***

Aspergilosis is a very challenging disease to cure. The location of the infections and the way the body attempts to wall off the fungus both restrict the ability of drugs to get to the fungus. Treatment takes a long time. The bird must have a strong immune system in order to completely eliminate the organism. Treatments may include oral, intravenous and aerosolized antifungal medications and/or surgical removal of fungal plaques. Supportive care includes hospitalization, oxygen therapy, heat, force feeding and treating any other underlying or concurrent diseases.

Good hygiene, clean environment, fresh clean food items and strong immune system are necessary to help prevent future outbreaks of aspergillosis.

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*This client information sheet is based on material written by Rick Axelson, DVM & Shawn Messonnier, DVM*

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