Healthy Care for Budgies & Cockatiels

Budgie Sanctuary Rescue

ABN: 39 801 538 119

Food, chop, fresh water, cage space and natural perches

The everyday foundation

A healthy companion bird needs more than a bowl of seed. Use a quality species-appropriate formulated pellet as the nutritional base, add a wide range of vegetables and leafy greens every day, and keep seed, nuts and fruit controlled. Any major diet change should be gradual - never remove the familiar food until you have confirmed the bird is eating the new food and maintaining weight.

A practical daily balance

- About 60-70% quality formulated pellets, chosen for the bird's species and size.
- About 25-35% vegetables, leafy greens and healthy chop. Aim for several colours and textures.
- Usually 5-10% measured seed, nuts and fruit as species-appropriate extras, foraging rewards or training treats.
- Budgies and cockatiels naturally enjoy seed, but an unrestricted seed-only diet is high in fat and nutritionally incomplete. Measure seed and use millet mainly as a reward or foraging food.
- Weigh the bird regularly on a gram scale. Sudden weight loss, appetite change or droppings change needs prompt avian-vet advice.

Fresh water

- Provide clean drinking water at all times. Replace it at least morning and evening, and immediately if food or droppings enter it.
- Wash bowls daily with hot water and bird-safe detergent, rinse thoroughly and allow to dry. Stainless-steel or glazed ceramic bowls are easiest to clean.
- Do not routinely add vitamins, medications or vinegar to drinking water unless an avian veterinarian directs it.

Simple healthy chop

A flexible base - choose several items from each group rather than using every ingredient at once.

Group	Good everyday choices
Leafy greens	Kale, bok choy, Asian greens, silverbeet in rotation, cos lettuce, rocket, dandelion greens from a pesticide-free source
Orange/red	Carrot, capsicum, pumpkin, cooked sweet potato
Green/crunchy	Broccoli, cauliflower, green beans, peas, zucchini, cucumber, celery leaves
Whole-food extras	Cooked quinoa, brown rice, barley or lentils; fresh herbs such as basil, coriander and parsley in rotation
Occasional fruit	Berries, papaya, melon, mango, pear or apple with all seeds removed

Preparation and serving

- Wash produce well. Chop to a size the bird will explore rather than making a wet puree.
- A simple batch might be: broccoli + carrot + capsicum + leafy greens + cooked quinoa. For small birds, chop finely enough to sample but leave visible texture.
- Serve a small fresh portion in a clean bowl, ideally in the morning. Remove moist food after about 2 hours - sooner in hot weather.
- Freeze extra chop in small daily portions. Thaw in the refrigerator and never refreeze a thawed portion.
- Introduce one or two new foods at a time. Mix a little through familiar food, offer repeatedly, and eat safe produce nearby to model interest.

Foods to keep out

- Avocado; chocolate and cocoa; alcohol; caffeine; xylitol; and highly salty, sugary or fatty foods.
- Onion, garlic and related concentrated products; fruit stones and apple seeds; mouldy or spoiled food.
- Unverified wild plants or branches, food contaminated by saliva, and non-stick cookware fumes near birds.

Housing, flight and healthy feet

Cage size is a starting point, not a finish line. Choose the largest safe cage you can provide, prioritise width and unobstructed horizontal movement, and provide daily supervised exercise in a bird-safe room or a suitable aviary.

Bird	Practical home-cage target	Bar spacing
Budgie	At least 90 W x 45 D x 60 H cm for one or a compatible pair; longer is better	About 10-13 mm
Cockatiel	At least 90 W x 60 D x 90 H cm for one; increase for a pair	About 13-16 mm

Measure the individual bird before buying: the bird must fully extend and flap both wings without touching bars, toys or perches. A pair or group needs substantially more usable space, multiple feeding stations and escape routes from one another.

Natural perches

- Use several clean, bird-safe natural branches with varied diameters, angles and bark texture. Approximate diameter range for this group: roughly 8-18 mm, with variation.
- The toes should wrap comfortably without meeting underneath. Include at least one broad resting perch and avoid making every perch the same diameter.
- Place perches so droppings cannot fall into food or water and so the centre of the cage remains open for movement. Replace branches when heavily chewed or soiled.
- Avoid sandpaper perch covers and relying on abrasive cement perches; they can damage feet. Rope must be checked daily and removed if fibres fray or are swallowed.

Species reminders

- Offer grass heads, leafy greens and safe browse for natural foraging. Budgies may need very small pellet sizes.
- Cockatiels can gain excess weight on sunflower-rich mixes. Use sunflower sparingly and encourage active foraging.
- Do not place mirrors as a substitute for social contact; some birds become hormonally fixated or defensive.

When to call an avian veterinarian

- Reduced appetite, sitting fluffed, weakness, tail bobbing, vomiting, breathing effort, bleeding, sudden weight loss or a major droppings change.
- Birds often hide illness. If a bird seems unwell, keep it warm and quiet and seek avian-vet advice promptly rather than waiting.

Sources and note

Prepared as general husbandry guidance using RSPCA Australia companion-bird nutrition advice, the NSW Code of Practice for Keeping and Trading of Birds, Agriculture Victoria's Code of Practice for the Housing of Caged Birds, and general veterinary bird-management guidance from the Merck Veterinary Manual. Cage targets in this guide are welfare-oriented practical recommendations and should be increased whenever possible. Updated September 2026.

rspca.org.au | dpird.nsw.gov.au | agriculture.vic.gov.au | merckvetmanual.com

budgiesanctuaryrescue.org