

# FEATHER PICKING DISORDERS IN PET BIRDS

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Feather picking in pet birds is an extremely complex issue. There are many reasons why birds will begin to pick, encompassing medical as well as behavioral problems, making effective diagnosis and treatment problematic. Feather destructive behavior is a problem of caged birds and is not seen commonly in birds not kept in cages. Some of the causes recognized in pet birds that can induce the bird to damage it's own feathers ( as opposed to feather loss from other causes) are as follows:

## DIETARY -

- General malnutrition
- Deficiency of omega-3 fatty acids
- Excess salt in diet (e.g. Cockatoos)
- Food allergies (e.g. peanuts, sunflower seeds)

## MEDICAL -

pain (chronic vs. recent onset)	Egg related (ectopic ova, serositis, hormonal activity)
Osteoporosis/ metabolic bone disease	Malabsorption disease
Atherosclerosis	Pancreatitis
Endocrine disorders	Thyroid disease
Parasites (external or internal)	Giardiasis
Hepatopathies (liver disorders)	Feather follicle infections (aspergillus, bacterial, etc.)
Granulomas	Excessive hormones (male and female)
Mycotoxins	Genetic (parents were feather pickers)
Uropygial gland disease (impaction, infection, neoplasia)	

## BEHAVIORAL

- Fear or panic following a traumatic event
- Boredom or other behavioral problem
- Cage mate aggression
- Fear from a change in the environment
- Wing clipping (initial vs improper)
- Lack of social interaction
- Nesting frustration

“Treatments for feather picking disorders vary considerably but should be based on the individual assessment with an attempt to address the underlying factors as well as the psychogenic manifestations.”

(- Ness, R: Integrative Therapies, In Harrison, Lightfoot (eds): Clinical Avian Medicine. Spix Pub 2006)

This implies the diagnosis and treatment of any medical problems, the conversion to a well balanced diet, and the enrichment of the bird's environment including being involved in family activity, exercise (flying in a protected space), as well as captive foraging and environmental manipulation for food. Remember that birds need exposure to sunlight which is not filtered through glass. Use of psychotropic medications is questionable unless mutilation is present.