

You have watched several You Tube videos, talked to pet store workers and spoken with area bird breeders. Adding a cockatiel to your family is your wise choice. The day has come to bring home your baby bird and now you think of all the questions you wished you had asked before. Let's cover some basics.

Introduce the baby to his new cage. Check that your cage bar spaces are no more than $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{5}{8}$ inches. Potentially deadly accidents can occur if your baby can get his head through the bars or they are close enough to get a foot or leg caught. You would think that finding food and water dishes would be pretty easy for a baby bird. It isn't. For some babies new dishes are scary. Sometimes new toys and perches are also scary. Make sure your baby is eating and drinking. It's a good idea to have available a little of what your baby is used to. Introduce what you will be feeding now. Stem or spray millet is something a lot of babies already know about. It's commonly referred to as "comfort" food for birds. If your baby is bobbing his head and crying, he's hungry. If he isn't interested in any of the food choices in his cage, you will have to get creative. I like to have cooked mixes on hand. I'm not getting paid to mention this but Bird Street Bistro has a lot of different flavors to choose from. Cockatiels prefer the vegetable flavors. The new baby bird must be in his cage long enough to explore and get comfortable with new surroundings. Babies also need to become familiar with new family members. Don't be afraid to hold, cuddle, and get to know your new bird. Just make sure there is cage time, too.

"Stepping up" your baby bird is the best way to move him from one place to another. Some babies are good at this already, others are not. Simply press the side of your pointer finger gently into his chest and say "Step Up" An instinct he has will cause him to do so. When you want to put him on a play stand or play basket, just say "Step Off" and slide your hand under the perch you want him on so that he has to step off. It won't be long before he has learned the commands step up and step off. Some babies may act a bit bossy when you first start this. Don't let that deter you. Be patient but be firm. This is for you teaching your bird, not your bird teaching you.

Cover the cage when lights go out. Birds require between 10 and 12 hours of sleep a night. Some people have a different sleeping cage in a quiet room for their birds. Just covering a cage in the family room does not guarantee uninterrupted sleep time. Cockatiels can become startled easily. Lights coming in from a window, people up moving around, other animals moving around can all frighten a bird. We call these episodes of fright at night, night frights. They usually result in at least a few broken feathers or blood feather breaks. If there is no blood, just pull out the broken feather at the shaft and it will grow back in soon. Some will be blood feathers. If you can easily pull out the feather from the shaft, it will stop the bleeding. If it is a wing feather or one you can't pull out easily, use a blood stop powder or styptic powder and use a sterile gauze to apply pressure. You can try corn starch or a blood stop stick as well. Hold a bit of pressure on the area to slow bleeding, apply styptic powder and continue to apply pressure to help with clotting. If it stops bleeding after a few minutes you are good to just leave it alone. If it does not stop, the blood feather will need to be removed. Your veterinarian can do this and so can most experienced

breeders.

A visit to your veterinarian may not be necessary but I consider a well visit a good plan. If your vet knows your bird. If necessary some tests may be run. Nail and wing clips may be done at this time. The more your bird's Doctor knows about your healthy bird, the better off you are if he should become ill. Take your bird in a safe pet carrier with no toys, food or water. Put plain paper on the bottom of the carrier. Your veterinarian will want to see a good healthy poop. Your vet will also tell you what symptoms to look for and when to bring your bird in for a visit.

At some point in time you will notice feathers dropping in his cage. The baby will go through a *molt* at between 6 and 12 months. At this time you will see some changes. If your baby male is a pearl, he will start to lose his pearl feathers and grow in new solid color gray feathers. He is still a pearl genetically but will look like a normal gray. He will get a yellow face. If your baby is a pearl pied, he may only lose most but not all of his pearl. A whiteface baby male will get his white face. Molting is a way for birds to lose their dirty, kind of messy feathers and grow in new beautiful feathers. Warm weather will usually trigger this. Some birds will act tired and grumpy during a molt and others-you can't even tell it is happening. Molting does require a lot of extra energy so expect a bit of an attitude change. If your bird might also be going through puberty, expect a bit of the " grumpies".

There are several toxins in our surroundings that can actually kill birds. There are good articles online about these. If you can, read up a little online. One of the most common toxins is ***polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE)*** or teflon. When heated, this substance releases a toxic fumes that will kill birds. When checking for this in your home, considered non stick oven liners, baking pans, new heating elements in fryers, heaters, furnace repair parts, etc. Those of us with multiple birds will usually have our toaster ovens, air fryers, etc. in the garage. It's just better to be safe than sorry. I even run new electric or gas heaters outside for several hours before bringing them inside.

Consider environmental hazards. Mirrors and windows can be flown into fast enough to cause a concussion or broken neck., Bodies of water such as toilet bowls or full kitchen sinks are easy to get into but not out of. Ceiling fans, house plants, scented candles or Fabreze are potentially hazardous. Even toys in the cage can become dangerous. Baby bird proof as much as you can. Birds require a lot of supervision.

To clip flight feathers or not is a hard decision for several bird owners. It really is up to you, the owner. Birds can fly with clipped flight feathers, just not as high or as fast. In my opinion, it gives a cockatiel owner a fighting chance at retrieving an escaped bird. You get so used to one being on your shoulder or hanging out on you that it's easy to walk outside with one. Even if you are pretty sure your baby would come back, consider that they are prey. Hawks and owls and other larger birds will swoop in and grab a cockatiel faster than you can get to it. Cockatiels tend to fly up higher and higher and are afraid to fly down. That makes outdoor rescue even harder. I have had many friends lose

their precious bird permanently. There are some tried and successful ways to retrieve a bird once it has flown off. You must act fast. For birds, this is a frantic time. Try to imagine what he sees and help him get back. One such method is to place your birds cage outside where he can see it close to where it flew off. Have someone ready near the cage to net the bird or quickly close the cage if it should return. Another method is to put your bird's cage mate or friend out in the cage next to your bird's cage to help call it back. Of course, this only works if you have more than one bird. Use familiar sounds, call his name, repeat his favorite whistles or phrases. As long as you have a visual on the bird you still have a chance to lure him back. Sometimes, plan B must be initiated. A neighborhood watch may have to be started. Local kids and families will help spot. Have a picture of your bird so that you can make and post missing posters. Notify your local bird club, veterinarians, lost and found centers, and if you have one, list your bird with 911 rescue bird sites that cover your area. While teaching your bird to recall is great in the house, a frightened bird may not be able to do this. It's still a good idea to do a little recall training, just in case.

Many cockatiels have lived a long and happy life with their families and hopefully yours will, too. They are the most wonderful, loving and entertaining family pet. Enjoy your new baby.