

Excessive or Chronic Egg-laying in Birds: Causes, Effects, and Treatment

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Excessive egg-laying can be a problem in multiple species of birds, but especially in cockatiels, lovebirds, and budgerigars. It occurs when a hen has a larger than normal clutch (an uninterrupted series of eggs laid by a hen, usually 2-6 eggs depending on the species) or lays repeated clutches. Hens may lay eggs even if there is no male bird present.

In the wild, egg-laying may be stimulated by the changes in photoperiod (day length), availability of food and nesting materials, increases in temperature and humidity, and other environmental conditions. In the home, these conditions may be created inadvertently with the use of artificial lighting, climate controls, and diet.

What causes excessive egg-laying?

Multiple factors may contribute to excessive egg-laying. These include:

- Being hand-raised or imprinted on a human (from a young age the bird has viewed a human being as his mother, or one of his own species)
- Hormonal imbalance (possibly genetic)
- Other illness
- Poor diet (e.g., seeds only)
- Increased daylight

How does excessive egg-laying affect the health of the bird?

Chronic or excessive egg-laying may cause multiple health problems, most of them related to the nutritional demands of producing eggs, especially the need for calcium and protein. Complications include:

- [Egg binding](#), which can occur if the shells of the eggs become softer due to calcium deficiency
- Osteoporosis, which could eventually lead to broken bones
- Weight loss
- Feather loss and mild skin irritation around the cloaca
- Malnutrition

How is excessive egg-laying treated?

A variety of therapy options are used to treat hens who lay eggs excessively. Generally a combination of therapies need to be used.

Behavioral modification: Changing the environment and removing the stimulus to lay eggs can help. These need to be done gradually so they do not further stress the bird.

- If the bird is especially attached to one person in the household, that person should have less interactions with the bird and not pet or groom the bird, as this may be interpreted by the bird as mating behavior. Instead, interactions with the bird that include foraging for food and training should be substituted.
- Change the bird's cage or location in the home.
- Decrease the bird's exposure to light and household activity to 8 to 10 hours a day.
- Move cage mates to a different cage, away from the hen. They may need to be separated far enough away so they cannot even hear each other.
- Items in the cage that may stimulate laying or serve as a "mate," such as mirrors and toys (e.g., small plastic birds), should be removed and replaced with other objects such as [foraging toys](#).
- Remove nesting materials and anything in the cage that could be used as a nest.
- Avoid feeding any warm or soft foods, or table foods other than vegetables. Avoid sugary and fatty foods. If on a seed diet, [switch to a pelleted diet](#).

Medical treatment: To promote the health of the bird and to slow down or prevent more egg laying, the following treatments may be advised by your veterinarian in addition to the changes described above:

- Correction of any nutritional deficiencies is essential. This may include the administration of vitamins, minerals, changing the amount of calories, and changing or adding protein sources.
- Administration of hormones, such as leuprolide to stop egg laying.



- Surgery to remove the reproductive tract (spaying) may be used to permanently stop the egg laying. This is a high-risk procedure in birds because of their very small size, and the delicateness of the reproductive tract.