Canary Care Sheet

This care sheet is designed only as a brief introductory guide to keeping these fascinating birds. Before you decide whether to bring a canary into your family please consult some of the many excellent books and websites available as well as talking to your vet or veterinary nurse at this practice.

Canaries originate in The Azores, Canary Islands and Madeira where they live in small flocks in semi-open areas with small trees. In captivity they can live 10-15 years. In the wild canaries are predominantly green and yellow, which the males being brighter colours than the females.

As a general rule male canaries are better singers although both sexes make good pets. Canaries naturally live in flocks and so prefer to be housed in pairs or groups.

Nutrition and feeding

A diet of only dry seeds is deficient in 32 vitamins and minerals and so the diet should be supplemented by:

**Whole cereals and whole grains**: Amaranth, barley, couscous, flax, whole-grain pastas, oat, quinoa, whole-wheat, wild-rice, whole rices.

**Edible blossoms and flowers**: Carnations, chamomille, chives, dandelion, fruit tree blossoms, herbs’ blossoms, hibiscus, honeysuckle, impatiens, lilac, nasturiums, pansies, passion flower (Passiflora), roses, sunflowers, tulips, violets. Note that the leaves of some of these plants are poisonous to canaries.

**Greens and/or Weeds**:

Mainly: Bok-choi, broccoli and/or cauliflower leaves, cabbage leaves, collard greens, dandelion leaves, kelp, mustard leaves, seaweeds, spirulina, water cress.

Occasionally: Amaranth leaves, beet leaves, starfruit, chards, parsley, spinach and turnip leaves. All of these contain high levels of oxalic-acid which bind calcium and other trace minerals present in foods with which they are ingested possibly leading to deficiencies.

**Fruit (except avocados which are toxic)**: all apple varieties, banana, all berry varieties, all citrus varieties, grapes, kiwi, mango, melons, nectarine, papaya, peach, all pear varieties, plum, star-fruit. Pits and seeds from every citrus and drupe species (nectarines, peaches, plums etc) should be discarded as
potentially toxic. However, tiny seeds from bananas, blueberries, elderberries, aubergine, persimmons, pomegranates, raspberries, strawberries, tomatoes are acceptable

**Legumes:** Almonds, Beans, Lentils, Peas, Nuts and Tofu.

**Grain and/or legume sprouts:** Adzuki beans, alfalfa beans, buckwheat, lentils, Mung beans, pinto beans, red kidney beans, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds.  
Caution with lima and navy beans' sprouts which are toxic.  
Vegetables (except uncooked potatoes, uncooked onions and all mushrooms): beet, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, cucumber, all cabbage varieties, fresh beans, fresh romaine lettuce, fresh peas, parsnip, all pepper varieties, all squash varieties, sweet potatoes, tomato, turnip, courgettes

**Pellets specifically formulated for canaries,** such as Harrisons High Potency Super Fine.

Adding these foods provides additional nutrients and can prevent obesity and liver disease as can offering a wider range of seeds rather than purely millet. Adult canaries often do not always adapt readily to dietary additions, so try to introduce healthy diets as young as possible. Canaries learn mainly by mimicry and most adult canaries will be easily encouraged to try new foods by observing another bird eating the food, or by placing the new food on a mirror.

**Housing**

Daily access to free flight will dramatically improve the health and happiness of your pet who, in the wild, would fly for several hours per day seeking food. Close curtains to prevent birds flying into windows and ensure all windows and doors are closed.

Canaries are naturally sociable birds and prefer to be housed in pairs or groups, although care should always be taking when introducing new birds to avoid fighting.

Perches should be made of natural branches of varying orientations and diameters. Fruit woods are non-toxic and may be sterilised with care in an oven.

Fresh water should always be available and clean baths may be welcomed. Flooring may be made of loose sand, sand paper or paper. A light proof covering should be provided to allow for adequate periods of darkness Toys should be rotated and checked regularly for safety
**Light**

Canaries would naturally be exposed to high levels of sunlight and so have evolved to use the ultraviolet light from the sun to make vitamin D which they need to regulate calcium levels. Unfortunately ultraviolet light cannot penetrate glass and so canaries housed entirely indoors can show vitamin D deficiency. On sunny days move your canaries’ cage to a sheltered spot outside or consider buying a specially designed ‘bird lamp’ which give off ultraviolet light safely. UV light is also important for behaviour in these birds as they can see ultraviolet light, using it to identify other birds and foods.

Remember bird cages placed in a window can easily overheat so make sure your pet can also get away from excesses of heat and light.

Canaries need at least 8 hours of sleep per night so in the late evening cover up the cage or move them to a quieter room.

**Hygiene**

The cage and food and water bowls should be cleaned routinely. Rinse the items well after cleaning. Canaries can (rarely) harbour the bacteria *Chlamydomphile psittaci* which is dangerous to people, as well as other potentially seriously harmful organisms such as *Salmonella*. Be sure to wash your hands after handling the canary or its cage. Children, the elderly, pregnant or sick should not come into direct contact with canaries or contaminated materials. Always seek prompt medical attention should you become unwell.

**Temperament and handling**

It is very useful to be able to handle your bird and canaries are easily tamed. Encourage them to take food items from you by offering treats and then progress to getting them to perch on your hand or finger. If frightened canaries can give a small nip so if you need to pick up a canary who is not tamed it is best to gently cover the bird with a cotton tea towel to protect your fingers. Canaries are usually more easy to pick up in dim light.

**Veterinary care**

Most of the medical problems experienced by canariess can be prevented by paying close attention to good husbandry and nutrition but they can still develop just as many health problems as any other pet. Often a canary will try to conceal signs of ill health so if you are worried in any way seek prompt veterinary advice. Common problems to look out for include weight loss, diarrhoea, fluffed up feathers, loss of appetite or difficulty breathing. Your vet is the best person to advise you about your pet’s health and will be happy to answer any questions you may have. Rather than wait for a problem to occur why not make an
appointment for your canary to have a regular check up, just as you would with a dog or cat.

**Pet Insurance**

Pet insurance is available for canaries and means that financial concerns do not add to the worry of having a sick pet.