

## Sinusitis in Parrots

Sinusitis (also called a sinus infection) is a common, and sometimes serious, problem in parrots. Although they can occur in any species, African Greys seem particularly susceptible.

Understanding the structure of the sinuses:

The sinuses are basically hollow pockets within the bird's skull. When a bird inhales, air passes through the nares and into the sinus cavities where it is warmed and humidified. The infraorbital sinuses are triangular in shape, they surround the eyes and extend into both the upper and lower beaks. Because of this location, sinus infections can extend to the eyes. There are drainage openings at the top of the infraorbital sinuses, but they open upward. This means any mucus or debris that enters them can become trapped. Small hair-like cells called cilia move in a sweeping motion to keep them clear.

Risk factors:

Vitamin A is necessary to maintain the health of the cells lining the sinus cavities. When this vitamin is lacking, due to a poor diet, the lining becomes damaged, the mucus thickens, and the cilia become unable to clear debris. The built up fluid becomes an easy breeding ground for bacteria, like water in a stagnant pond, and infection can occur. In extreme cases, an abscess may develop. Vitamin A deficiency is often the result of a seed diet. Low humidity and exposure to cigarette smoke or other toxins can also damage the cells lining the sinuses.

Signs of sinus infection:

All birds sneeze occasionally, but excessive sneezing or sneezing that produces mucus drainage are causes for concern. Discharge from the nares or eyes can also occur. The nares may become plugged. Swelling of the face or around the eyes can also be signs of infection. An examination by an avian veterinarian should be performed. Because sinus infections can extend to other parts of the respiratory system, pneumonia may occur. Birds may be less active, lose weight, or show signs of respiratory distress. These are signs of a very sick bird and require immediate veterinary attention.

Treatment:

Sinus infections can be bacterial or fungal, and are usually treated with antibiotics or antifungals. A culture may be necessary to determine the organism responsible. Sometimes flushing of the sinus cavities is necessary, but this should only be done if recommended by your avian veterinarian. Severe cases or abscesses may require surgical drainage. Sometimes there is plugging of the nares by debris, these can harden into rhinoliths (rhino = nasal, lith = stone). These plugs may enlarge causing permanent distortion of the nares. Debris in the nares may need to be softened and removed by a veterinarian.