

A Healthy Bird = A Good Start

After researching which type of bird would make the best match for your household, be sure to examine the bird thoroughly before taking it home to make sure it is healthy! Start with the head and work down the bird's body, check for these signs of the bird's health:

- **Nostrils** should be clear, free of discharge, and of equal size.
- **Eyes** should be bright and alert and free of discharge. If you're considering a red-eyed bird, such as a budgerigar, look at the eyes even more closely because these birds are more prone to cataracts and blindness than their dark-eyed counterparts.
- **Breathing** should be inaudible. Listen closely for wheezing, which could indicate parasites. Tip: You can get an accurate assessment of the bird's breathing by watching its tail movements. You should see barely any tail movement while the bird is in a resting state.
- **Bill** should be free of any deformities. The top and bottom parts of the bill should meet and open and close properly.
- **Face** should be free of swelling around the sides of the bill and around the eyes. Also look for face mites, which look like snail tracks and scar the upper bill area.
- **Plumage** should be glossy and free of bald patches.
- **Alertness** should be shown. Healthy birds are alert and should respond to you when you are nearby.
- **Breastbone** should be barely noticeable, with pectoral muscles on both sides. The breastbone runs from the midline to the lower chest.
- **Wings** should have no feather gaps or blood present when extended. Also check to make sure the bird does not pluck its own feathers.
- **Skin** should be clear and unspotted when the feathers are parted.
- **Feet** should be smooth, not scaly.
- **Toes/Claws** should be paired—all the toes should have claws. Claws should be slightly curved, not curled, hooked, or wavy. Observe how the bird perches. Usually two or three claws will rest on the front of the perch and one to two toes in the back. A healthy bird perches easily, without slipping or falling off.
- **Weight** should be distributed so you aren't able to place your fingers on both sides of the keel (breastbone).
- **Vent** (excretory opening) should be free of any fecal matter.