

Feather Picking and Self-Mutilation

Feather picking and self-mutilation are not uncommon problems in many parrot species. There are many causes and in most cases there is more than one contributing factor. Diagnosis may involve numerous tests and treatment trials to determine if there are concurrent diseases, nutritional and/or behavioural problems. Nutritional and husbandry problems are generally present in the majority of cases. Feather picking and self-mutilation may be caused by:

Infectious Diseases

- Viral diseases – Beak and Feather Disease, Polyomavirus, Poxvirus
- Bacterial diseases of the skin (usually secondary infections) including *Staphylococcus* sp., *Streptococcus* sp., Gram-negative infections and Mycobacteria.
- Psittacosis / Chlamydia
- Fungal diseases of the skin and feathers
- Internal Parasites – Protozoa (*Giardia* sp., *Hexamita* sp. *Cochlosoma* sp.) worms and Coccidia.
- External Parasites – mites and lice (an uncommon cause of feather picking and self mutilation)

Non Infectious Diseases

- Nutritional deficiencies (commonly involved in most feather picking) – all seed diets are a particularly common problem
- Allergies to food, aerosol particles and in-contact substances
- Poisons and toxins – heavy metal (lead, zinc and copper_ nicotine and plant poisons.
- Metabolic and organ diseases – especially liver, kidney and air sac problems.
- Psittacine pruritic polyfolliculosis
- Skin growths and lumps – trauma, wing clipping, feather cysts, tumours, abscessed, adhesions, granulomas and internal tumours.
- Moulting

Behavioural Problems

- Boredom
- Lack of a mate or friend
- Lack of visual, tactile and aural stimulation
- Lack of regular flying time, sunlight and showers
- Birds that feel threatened or insecure
- Hormonal, especially in breeding season

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to call Brisbane Bird Vet.