



THE BIRD CLINIC VETERINARY CORPORATION

PET BIRDS AND CANCER RISK

In 1992 there was a great deal of press regarding a link between bird ownership and lung cancer because of studies published in the **British Medical Journal** and then in **USA Today** (October 23, 1992) which stated that the risk of lung cancer doubles in people exposed to pet birds for up to 10 years and triples in people exposed for more than 10 years. Sounds terrible, right? Well there was much more in the details.....

A Berkeley research team wrote a rebuttal where they found there were limited controlled studies to have established any clear link between bird ownership and lung cancer. **The major cause of lung cancer is smoking**: fully 87% of all documented cases are attributed to cigarettes. But, that leaves 13% of lung cancer cases unexplained. Researchers have for some time been investigating other possible culprits, such as diet, occupational exposures (asbestos), and radiation. European studies have been small and the evidence is far from clear. Most of the cancer patients in that British published study were smokers, and it could be that smoking and exposure to birds interact to raise the risk? There were also no controls comparing the number of birds per household; so professional bird keepers may be at higher risk, but owning one or two birds has no ill effect? The Berkeley team also discovered that the **funding for the study was from the tobacco industry!** Data in a 2003 study showed that a birds' risk of respiratory disease from secondhand cigarette smoke equals or exceeds the proven risks in humans. In the BIRD Clinic we see a much higher percentage of respiratory, liver, heart, and skin problems (feather picking) in patients that live with smokers.

In conclusion, if you don't smoke, **your risk of cancer from a pet bird is extremely low**. If you smoke and have a bird, keep the bird and toss the cigarettes!

Steps you can take to mitigate any POSSIBLE risk for you and your pet bird:

- **Bathe your bird at least twice weekly**
- **Do not keep birds in your bedroom or kitchen (fumes and physical dangers)**
- **Change cage papers/bedding daily if possible**
- **“Air out” your home in nice weather**
- **Switch to non-aerosol cleaning products and avoid using any spray chemicals**
- **Buy and use a quality, HEPA air filter. In addition to doing an excellent job capturing feather dust/down, these filters will reduce smog, household dust, mold, yeast and other allergens and toxins - all of which are unhealthy for you and your bird.**

AIR FILTERS WILL DRAMATICALLY REDUCE FEATHER DUST IN THE HOME!!

*This publication is part of The BIRD C News™ series to help educate bird owners. Produced by The BIRD Clinic Veterinary Corporation
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Revised Apr 2024