



# Heavy Metal Poisoning in Parrots

Parrots are inquisitive animals that love to chew on almost anything. One of the problems we see regularly is when they accidentally ingest items that they were never supposed to eat!

We see parrots eat all kinds of things ranging from material fibres from toys in their cage right through to earrings that the owner was wearing!

This article is going to focus on the ingestion of metallic items and the potential problems that can be seen.

## What types of metal can cause problems?

As a general rule all metals have the potential to cause problems if ingested, generally through their absorption into the blood stream. Lead and zinc are the two most common metals that we see ingested.

## Where does the metal they eat come from?

Most commonly parrots ingest metal from chewing on their cage or items within their cage. The wire on many cages is covered in a zinc coating and many of the bell toys that are sold also contain different types of metal. We also see parrots that are free-ranging around the house chew on their owners jewellery as well as furniture such as curtain rails. Lead paint ingestion is not as common as it used to be however we do still see this from time to time.



## What problems can metal ingestion cause?

The toxic effects seen vary on the type and amount of metal ingested and can include:

- Weakness
- Ataxia (seeming unbalanced and 'drunk')
- Regurgitation or vomiting
- Lethargy and just being 'off'
- Haematuria (blood present in the urine component of their droppings)
- Paralysis and seizures
- Crop stasis

## What types of birds are affected?

All birds have the potential to suffer from heavy metal poisoning.

## How is heavy metal poisoning diagnosed?





There are a few different methods of diagnosing heavy metal poisoning. The two most common are radiographs (x-rays) and testing your parrot's blood lead and zinc levels.

**Is there treatment available?**

Absolutely! The treatment needed will depend greatly on how severe and ill your parrot is. Common treatments include chelation therapy injections to neutralize the toxic effects of the metal, fluid therapy, crop feeding and on occasion surgical or endoscopic removal of the metallic item.

**What should I do if I think my bird has ingested a piece of metal?**

The signs of metal poisoning can come on either gradually or very quickly, if you are suspicious of your bird ingesting any metal then we advise getting them seen as early as possible by an avian veterinarian.

