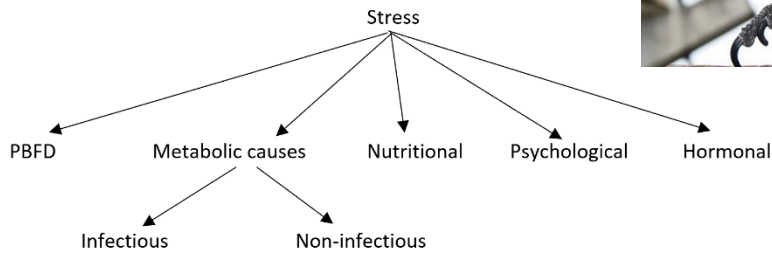


Feather Destructive Behaviour

Feather destructive behaviour represents a range of actions from excessive preening to feather plucking or feather picking to self-mutilation. The cause of feather destructive behaviour is not really understood but is often believed to be caused by multiple problems that may be psychological and/or medical. Picking may also begin as a medical problem and then persist as a habit.



A wide range of **medical problems** have been linked to feather picking including:

- Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (PBFD)
- Infections such as Chytridiosis, fungal, bacterial
- Endoparasitism (internal worms/parasites)
- Ectoparasites such as mites are a rare cause of feather picking
- Systemic disease including liver disease
- Poisoning such as lead, nicotine (second-hand smoke)
- Allergies may be suspected, but are difficult to confirm in avian patients
- Although inflammation of the feather follicles (folliculitis) and skin (dermatitis) is a frequent finding, it is usually secondary to the feather destructive behaviour
- Nutritional deficiencies especially vitamins and minerals

Behavioural or psychological causes of feather picking may include:

- Boredom or lack of stimulation
- Stress: Stress can mean very different things for different birds. Overstimulation in the form of noise and activity may initiate plucking in a nervous bird, while a sedate, quiet environment may be stressful for another bird.
- Separation anxiety

- Sexual frustration: Many birds (male and female) with high hormone levels can exhibit sexual frustration or “Obsessive Compulsive Disorders (OCD)” with the subsequent sign of feather picking/mutilation. This sometimes is accompanied by increased aggression in response to the breeding season for that species.
- Feather destructive behaviour may also be exacerbated by environmental factors such as low humidity or lack of exposure to natural sunlight.

Diagnosis:

Your veterinarian will want to

- obtain detailed information about your birds’ behaviour and its home life. A diary of events leading to the symptoms composed by the owner can often be a VERY valuable tool
- perform a medical diagnostic work-up to rule out medical causes of feather picking
- Tests can include radiographs, blood panels, viral/chlamydia testing, heavy metal testing, DNA sexing, as well as diet and nutritional evaluation.

In conclusion feather picking is NOT simple at all. Remember that feather picking is only a symptom and not a diagnosis. However, with today’s technology, experience, and owner’s patience, most birds can have dramatic improvements, but **FIRST** a proper diagnosis must be reached.