

# Basic Pigeon Care FAQ

A collaborative effort from knowledgeable individuals from companion pigeon servers including discord user:

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## #general

*"Where can I find reputable information about keeping pigeons as pets?"*

- [The Ramsey Loft](#) on Tumblr.
- [Tinysaurus-Rex](#) on Tumblr (see [Info](#) tag).
- [Indoor Pigeon Care](#) doc by Crisscrosscutout on Tumblr (with the exception of the feeding section).

*"Where can I pet my pigeon?"*

- Many pigeons like being pet and preened on their face, cheeks, head, and neck.
- Some pigeons may accept being pet on their chest and belly.
- Many pigeons accept pets on the back, wings and tail, however they may interpret this as being mounted and will react differently based on their individual comfort level and their relationship with their owner.

*"How do I hold or restrain a pigeon?"*

- The Ramsey Loft demonstrates the "Show Hold": <https://youtu.be/CyfZ7PitWVY>

*"Does it hurt when a pigeon bites you?"*

- Not really, very few pigeons can bite hard enough to break skin; they "bite" by pinching the skin with their beak.
- Biting and tugging on skin are things you can expect when "wrestling" or play-fighting, especially with a male pigeon. Female pigeons are usually more docile and less inclined to bite once tamed.

*"How long does a pigeon take to tame?"*

- Every pigeon is different and warms up to its new owner at its own pace but many human raised pigeons begin to show more interest and less fear after 2-3 months of living with their owner.
- Taming a pigeon requires patience and respect for the pigeon's individual desires and personal space: for the first few months it's likely the pigeon will be afraid of hands, run away, and show little desire to interact with the owner.
- Here's some tips to help you to bond.
  - Let the pigeon make the first move: interact with them slowly and watch for signs of fear (slicked feathers and wide eyes) and back off before it wants to fly away.
  - Talk to the pigeon as much as possible: teach them words like you would a toddler and use their name.
  - Nod your head, sing, hum, and slow blink at them.
  - Offer treats: safflower, millet, lentils and peas are some common favorites.
  - Hang out with them from a distance and make eye contact.
  - Turn out lights at bed time to avoid having to chase them around. Say something like "bed time" or "lights out", give them a minute then turn out the lights and grab them.
  - Announce what you intend to do, ex "Can I pet that bird", "I need to grab you", "Let me get that poo," after a while they will understand that when you say those things you perform that associated action, and that they don't need to be scared.
  - Respect their answer when they refuse to be pet or want some space.
- After a little time their fear of hands will become displays of aggression towards hands and they may bite and wing-slap and will stop running away.
  - When a pigeon fights your hand, wiggle it around a bit and "bite" them back by nipping at them playfully with your fingers; play fighting is part of bonding.
- Female pigeons will likely stop biting and wing-slapping as they warm up to their owner and male pigeons may continue to "fight" their owners long after they are bonded to show that they are strong and can defend a nest.
  - Every pigeon has its own unique personality: try not to have specific behavioral expectations.

## #housing

### *“Can I keep a pigeon in an apartment?”*

- Yes, female pigeons are typically quieter than males but overall pigeons are not loud enough to warrant a noise complaint.
  - We recommend against getting a pigeon in apartments that don't allow pets but many places don't consider birds to be a "pet" under a "no pets" rule so it doesn't hurt to ask.

### *“What accessories do I need for my pigeon?”*

- Separate dishes for food, water, and grit:
  - Dishes should be weighted or tip resistant.
  - Feeding from unglazed clay dishes (like terracotta) helps maintain the pigeon's beak but is porous and should not be used as a water dish.
- Hanging tug toys or bells and toys with different colors and textures.
- Bricks and rocks: the rough texture helps file their nails.
- Mirrors: pigeons are one of the few types of bird that can pass the mirror test, they should soon learn the pigeon in the mirror is not another bird.
- Nesting material: Rigid materials like straw or hay. Timothy Hay, Alfalfa hay, and Toilet paper rolls cut into strips are all good materials.
- Access to a window: They enjoy looking out the window but may perceive it as a space they can fly through. This can be resolved by placing a sticker on the window or marking it with an "x".
- Some pigeons benefit from being provided small stuffed animals to cuddle or play with. Pigeons that spend a lot of time alone may enjoy the stuffed animals company.

### *“What type of perches work best for pigeons?”*

- Flat, platform-type perches and shelves work best for pigeons.
  - Round perches are not ideal for the shape of a pigeon's foot, but they may still try to perch on things of that shape in their environment.
- Try to provide a variety of textures and widths for pigeon perches

- Wooden garden stakes and fencing can be cut and used as perches (about a cm slit on both ends)

*“Does my pigeon need a mate?/can I keep a single pigeon?”*

- Pigeons do not need another pigeon mate, most will happily bond with their human mate.

*“What size cage should my pigeon have?”*

- Many companion pigeon owners use dog crates to house their birds.
  - For average sized breeds: a XL dog crate (42 in / 107 cm) or larger.
  - For large breeds: a XXL dog crate (48 in / 122 cm) or larger.
  - For extra large breeds: a XXL dog crate (54 in / 137 cm) or larger.
- Pigeons should be allowed time out of their cage, with free-roam of at least one room throughout the day being preferred:
  - Daily exercise is crucial to maintaining your pigeons health.
  - Larger breeds are at greater risk of obesity.

*“Can my pigeon be housed with other animals/birds?”*

- No. Pigeons should not be caged with other animals or other pigeons that they are not bonded to. **Do Not** mix species in cages and **Do Not** leave a pigeon unattended with another animal.

*“How do I bird-proof my home?”*

- Move fragile items away from ledges and behind heavier items to protect them, ensure shelving and wall fixtures are secure.
- Move any house plants into corners and be sure all plants are bird safe.  
(<https://birdhism.com/blogs/news/common-bird-safe-house-plants>)
- Be aware of household hazards such as teflon (in nonstick pans), bug bait and bug sprays, open doors and windows, ceiling fans, scented candles (and open flame), unattended beverages, other animals, hot appliances, boiling water, smoke, air fresheners, chemical based cleaners, spray paints, and other chemical products.
- Always watch out for pets when cooking, apply spray paints outdoors, avoid smoking, using candles and room sprays in the same room as your bird and replace teflon coated cookware with nonstick ceramic or stainless steel

- Always smoke tobacco, marijuana, or use vaporizers/vapes outside or in a well-ventilated room located farthest away from the bird.
  - Wait 4 - 6 hours before bringing birds into a room where tobacco was smoked. Rooms that are frequently used to smoke tobacco should remain bird-free indefinitely..

*“What cleaners are safe to use around my pigeon?”*

- Commercial cleaners without strong fumes or scents are safe to use, always allow the object to dry before reintroducing to the bird.
- Homemade vinegar based cleaners can be used to within reasonable proximity of the bird
- Dish detergent can be used to clean pet dishes, non-porous toys and other items.
  - Dish soap mixed with isopropyl alcohol and water can used as a homemade spray cleaner and disinfectant
- Poop-off is an excellent bird-safe cleaner for getting rid of poop stains and dried, cemented poop from furniture, shelves, and enclosures.
  - Other alternatives include: Nature's Miracle: Bird Cage Cleaner,
  - Homemade cleaner: Lemon juice, baking soda and water (stirred not shaken rinse and dry).

*“How can I add pigeon space to my room” (shelves and such)*

- Cat furniture: cat trees, ramps and wall mounted perches
- Suction cup window perches
- Faux (or real) indoor trees
- "Floating" shelving
- "L" bracket shelving
- Converting available surfaces into pigeon friendly areas with a pillowcase and a few bricks and toys

*“Can I leave my pigeon unattended out of the cage?”*

- Most pigeons can be left unattended for up to a few hours once they are tame, a new pet should be monitored first to ensure they won't get into trouble and the room should be sufficiently bird-proofed.
- Never leave a bird unattended if they are sharing a space with another species.

- We do not recommend leaving a single pigeon alone for 8+ hours at a time, as this can severely stress a pigeon. Pigeons can be conditioned to tolerate being left alone for long periods of time, however this requires a bit of training and consistency when doing so.
- Do not leave a pigeon unattended with open doors and windows.

*"Can my pigeon find its way home? Is it safe to free fly pigeons?"*

- Unless the (homing) pigeon was born inside the house it will not be able to easily find its way back.
- Free flying a bird is extremely dangerous as it can be exposed to diseases and predators along with the possibility of it getting lost.
- We **Do Not** recommend allowing your pigeon outside without a harness or carrier.

## #diet

*"What do I feed my pigeon? What brands/mixes do you recommend?"*

- Pigeons are strict granivores: they only eat grains and seeds (including peas, corn, lentils and other legumes.)
- A pigeon's diet should consist of about 13 - 16% protein, 2.5 - 5.0% fat, and 2.5 - 6.0% fiber.
- For North American buyers, Baden, Browns, European Supreme, Foy's, Royal Wing, and Versele-Laga offer good pre mixed seed diets, and Foys & Versele-Laga offer pelleted food, the latter of which has higher quality mixes that are harder to find.
- For European Buyers, Versele-Laga may be a good option as it is based in Belgium
- Vitamin supplements can be used as needed and as directed by the vitamin product.  
**Always follow product instructions and proper dosages.**
- Calcium and Mineral Grit must be offered daily along with food and water, either in a separate bowl or sprinkled on top of food. Oyster Shell grit or Pickpots are good examples.
  - Note: If the pigeon appears to be overeating the grit, switch to sprinkling grit on top of food for a week or two before reintroducing the grit as free choice.
  - Avoid granite and other types of insoluble grit; they increase the risk of impaction and *aren't* needed by pigeons to digest foods.

*"How do I go about making my own food mixes?"*

- Start with a list of seeds and grains you want to use in your mix and choose a base.
  - Bases: brown, wild, paddy or other rice (not white rice), millet, barley, wheat, oat groats.
  - Common Bird seeds and grains: red millet, white millet, safflower, canary, black oil sunflower, nyjer, rapeseed, flaxseed, buckwheat.
  - Other seeds, legumes, and grains: dried peas (maple, whole green, split green, canadian, etc), lentils (red, green, brown), dried corn (popcorn, sweet corn, dent corn etc), vetch peas.
  - Avoid milo/kaffir as it has low nutritional value.
- Find nutritional information for dry ingredients at [Calorie King](#)
- Wild Bird seed mixes, Parrot seed mixes (without pellet), finch/canary seeds (without pellet) can be used when supplemented with proteins from legumes, corn and peas.

*“Can pigeons eat fruits and vegetables?”*

- No, pigeons are strict granivores, they should *only* be given seeds, grains and certain legumes. Many online resources suggest pigeons should be given fruits and vegetables as part of their diets, this is misinformation. [Source](#) (Ch 44 pg 1205)
- Pigeons lack a cecum required to ferment and process the complex sugars and cellulose in plant matter. Seeds are composed of cellulose, but in a different form that can be processed in the gizzard without fermentation.

*“What can I offer as a treat?”*

- Safflower, peas, corn, uncooked brown rice, lentils or millet are common pigeon favorites

*“What can I feed an orphaned baby pigeon?”*

- Kaytee Exact formula at around 104°F / 40°C is the closest to an ideal formula for baby pigeons.
- If the baby pigeon is over 2 weeks old, you can feed them seeds from an artificial crop.
  - Add seeds and warm water to a ziploc bag, cut off one corner, tuck it inward and offer to the baby. Squeeze the bag as they feed to hasten feeding.

#medical

*“What are signs of a sick pigeon?”*

- Lethargy
- Puffed up feathers
- Sunken in eyes
- Tail bobbing
- Abnormal droppings
- Weight Loss
- Coughing
- Mucus in the eyes, nares, and/or vent
- Poop stuck to vent
- Poor feather quality
- Loss of balance
- Vomiting
  - **See a veterinarian and seek advice for issues and injuries that are life threatening.**
  - Use Pigeon Symptoms checker as a reference  
[:http://chevita.com/en/pigeons/symptoms/index.php](http://chevita.com/en/pigeons/symptoms/index.php)

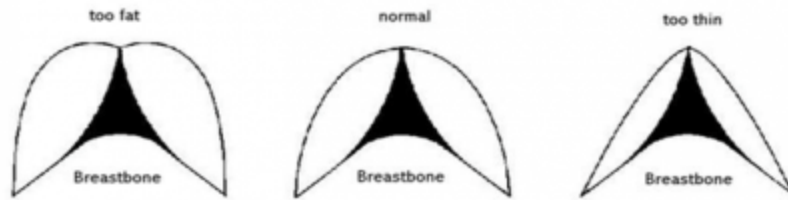
*“What do healthy droppings look like?”*

- Healthy poos are round, mostly solid, tan or brown and “capped” with an off-white urate. They can range from the size of a pinkie nail to quarter
  - Red grit can give poos a more reddish color
  - Feeding whole peas can cause soft poops due to increased water intake.
- Broody or morning poos will be large, up to the size of your finger and possibly more liquid depending on how full your birds crop was the night before
  - Poos taken after a bird has been sitting down/napping will also be larger than usual.
- Post shipping poos will be liquidy and green for 3+ days due to stress. You should see improvement in color and consistency however, if poos are not “normal” by the end of the week, consult a vet.

*“How can I tell if my pigeon is under/overweight?”*

- Feeling the keel of your pigeon is the best way to tell its body condition. You should be able to feel just the tip of the keel with firm muscle on either side.





*“How to prevent egg binding?”*

- Always provide nesting spots (pet beds, blankets etc.) and nesting material.
- **Never** discourage nesting behavior or take eggs away prematurely.
- Always have calcium and mineral grit available free choice or sprinkle a pinch of over the daily ration of food.

*“How do I treat feather lice?”*

- Treat with a permethrin dip. Dip once a week for four weeks. Sprays are ineffective as pigeons are tightly feathered and waterproof.
- Commercially available dips are made in 10% solutions, dips to be used on poultry should be diluted to 0.005% permethrin (by volume) by adding 20ml to 1 gallon of water.
- Dips can be used multiple times and should be disposed of in special hazardous waste collection sites as it is a highly toxic and carcinogenic pesticide.
  - If this is not possible dilute it and dispose of it down the drain in increments, with running water to further dilute it.
  - Do not reuse containers that have been used to dip birds, the solution will leach into plastics and other materials making them unsafe to use for anything else.

*“How do I treat internal parasites?”*

- Horse dewormer in rice-sized portions: treat weekly for two weeks to get rid of worms.
  - Avoid using the same dewormer each time to prevent the parasites from becoming immune to its effects.
- Strongid is the only dewormer that can treat strongyloides worms.
- Topical medications **cannot** treat internal parasites.
- Apple Cider Vinegar can be used as a preventative at 5ml / 1ts per 1L of water.
- Dried Oregano flakes can also be added to water occasionally as a preventative.

*“What does a structurally sound pigeon breed look like?”*

- A beak long enough to eat properly, preen, and feed peeps is important.
- The body shape should not be too heavy on the breast or unbalanced, this will cause difficulty walking and foot issues.
- Muffs (Feet and leg feathers) should not prevent the bird from walking normally or cause the bird discomfort in walking or standing.

*“What is a blood feather, and what do I do if one breaks?”*

- Blood feathers are newly growing feathers with a blood supply; as the feather grows the blood in the feather's sheath will be reabsorbed by the body (or used by the follicle to create the feather) and the pin casing will shed or be preened off by the bird.
- Blood feathers and pin feathers hurt when pushed in the opposite direction so be careful when petting your pigeon during a moult.
- Pluck a broken blood feather at the base, in the direction the feather grows, this stops the bleeding and allows for a new feather to grow in its place.
- Large flight feathers are anchored in the bones of the wing so pulling those can be extremely painful, if the blood feather is **not actively** bleeding pulling may be able to be avoided or delayed.
- Broken blood feathers are very common on feathered feet and should be pulled if **actively** bleeding.
- Broken blood feathers on wings and body are less common in properly housed pigeons but both are an **active emergency that must be treated immediately**.

*“My bird is losing a lot of feathers, should I be concerned, how can I help?”*

- Birds moult at least once yearly with the biggest moult starting in late spring or summer.
- Provide extra protein with hemp seeds (in moderation), peas, mung beans and lentils.
- Be gentle with pin feathers! Gently preen them if your bird allows, the new feathers are very sensitive.
- Birds can drop their feathers as a defense mechanism, in most cases the tail feathers are the only feathers dropped.

*“How do I clip my pigeon's nails?”*

- This video by The Ramsey Loft ([https://youtu.be/S0R6Nze-\\_\\_eo](https://youtu.be/S0R6Nze-__eo)) is a good guide on how to clip pigeon nails. Providing a brick in your pigeon's living space is also a good way to wear them down, as they usually like to stand on them.
- Baby nail clippers and cat clippers are both safe to use on a pigeon's nails, however the clippers must be replaced when they become dull to prevent splitting and splintering of the nail.
- If you accidentally clip a nail too short and it starts to bleed apply Kwik Stop™, styptic powder, flour, or cornstarch (along with pressure) to stop the bleeding.
  - A bleeding bird is an **active emergency** and stopping the bleeding quickly should be a priority.