



The Petfish.Net Guide To Betta Health And Disease Treatment

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Betta First Aid Kit

By Patrick H. (BettAtrick)

If you are new to keeping Bettas, it is smart to have certain items and medications at your disposal to help combat frequent Betta diseases. Here is a brief overview of a couple frequently-used items and medications carried by experienced Betta enthusiasts.

Hospital Tank: Having a separate tank as a “hospital tank” will help isolate your fish so their fish friends can't catch their disease. Some medications also kill the biological filter of cycled aquariums, so a separate tank is helpful. Another great benefit of Hospital tanks is that it makes dosing of medications a lot easier. Some people like to use 1 gallon containers as a hospital tank and some like using 2.5 gallon containers.

Aquarium Heater: Increasing the temperature in your hospital tank can help accelerate the life cycle of parasites, thus making it faster to kill them. In conjunction with other medications, heat your tank to about 85 degrees Fahrenheit for common parasites such as Ich and Velvet.



Water conditioner: Removes chlorine, chloramines, and other harmful/poisonous elements found in tap water. It is not recommended to use de-ionized water because there are some helpful elements found in tap water. Some conditioners contain aloe or other additives to help reduce stress and restore the natural slime coat found on fish. Water conditioners should be used regardless if your Betta is healthy or sick.

Aquarium Salt (or Rock Salt): Salt helps prevent parasitic diseases such as Ich and Velvet. Salt

also encourages regeneration of fins after fin rot. You can also use a salt bath in fungal infections as it helps dehydrate and kill Fungus. Many enthusiasts add 1 tsp. of salt per gallon of their Betta's water at all times as a preventive measure.

Epsom Salt (Found in the Laxative section of your local Drug Store): Helps treat Betta Constipation. Dissolve 1 Tbsp. of Epsom salt per gallon of water. Let your Betta soak in his Epsom Salt bath for 15-20 minutes. Then return your Betta to their normal home. This can be repeated about twice a day.

Melafix: Contains Melaleuca oils and are good for promoting the regeneration of fins after fin rot. Do not use this to treat Fin Rot because it does not kill bacteria. It is most effective when used after the fin rot bacteria is killed. Add 1 tsp. per 10 gallons or about 12-14 drops per gallon of water.

Jungle Fungus Clear (Blue Tablet) or Jungle Fungus Eliminator (Yellow crystals in a bottle.): Both medications are antibiotics, have the same active ingredients, and treat the same diseases. Contrary to what the package says for JFC and JFE, they do not treat Fungus. Instead, these work well as for minor bacterial infections such as Fin Rot and Columnaris (sometimes mistaken for fungus). Add 1 tablet of JFC per 10 gallons of water. Add 1 tsp. of JFE for 5 gallons or add ¼ tsp. per gallon of water.

Broad-Spectrum Antibiotics: There are two types of bacteria that cause illnesses in Bettas. Some antibiotics, such as Marcylin I or Marcylin II, each target only one type of bacteria. If you decide to use Marcylin, it is best if you use I and II together. Kanacyn –or– Tetracycline are both broad-spectrum antibiotics that target both types of bacteria and work great for severe infections including: advanced cases of Fin Rot, Columnaris, Septicemia, and sometimes Dropsy. Typically, add one pill per 10 gallons of water, unless otherwise stated on package instructions.

Methylene Blue: Many pet stores add this to the containers they sell Bettas in. It is effective in fighting fungal infections and sometimes helps treat Ich. Methylene Blue is also used to help sterilize aquarium equipment by soaking nets, aquarium decorations, tongs, etc. in solution. Add 1 tsp. per 10 gallons or 12-14 drops per gallon of water.

Copper-Based Medications: Good for treating parasites such as Ich and Velvet. Copper is poisonous to Bettas, so it's well advised not to overdose. Some medications, such as Cupramine and CopperSafe contain a safer type of copper. Aquarisol does not contain the safer type of copper and overdose can lead to copper poisoning. These medications will kill invertebrates, such as snails, and will sometimes harm plants. Use as directed.

****A special note about dosing medications****

Medications are typically sold in dry tablet or pill forms. An easy way to administer medications is to dissolve the tablet or pill in water and add the solution to the treatment tank. If your tank is smaller than 10 gallons, say a 5 gallon tank, some people dissolve one tablet or pill in 10 tablespoons of water and add 5 tablespoons of the solution to the treatment tank. However, once these tablets are dissolved in water, the medications start to become less effective and essentially useless in a couple days. If your Betta is in a smaller tank, such as a 5 gallon tank, you can prevent wasting the left-over solution by dividing the tablet or pill in half before you dissolve it. For 2.5 gallon tanks, you can cut the original pill into quarters.

Swim Bladder Disease

By Rachel Hunt (Mushi)

Swim Bladder Disorder Information and Symptoms

Swim Bladder Disorder is an extremely common betta ailment, and it typically looks worse than it actually is. I know, you're probably sitting there watching your poor betta flop around, struggling valiantly to make it to the top for air, and basically looking nothing like his usual graceful self, and thinking to yourself, "This is it, I'm going to lose him." Let me make you feel a little better before I get into all the details - Swim bladder problems are not contagious, they don't seem to be painful, they are generally easy to treat, and they are usually not even close to fatal. Feel better? Good, let's get on to the fun stuff.

Symptoms can include:

Either floats uncontrollably to the top of the tank, or sinks to the bottom.

Seems to struggle greatly while swimming, and often will swim at an unusual angle.

May or may not have a "kinked" spine, often in the shape of an "S" when viewed from above.

May lie around, barely moving except when a mad dash is made to the surface for air.

May or may not have a swollen belly, often caused by constipation

Swim Bladder Disorder Treatment

Swim Bladder Disorder can be caused by several things, and it's best to try to figure out the cause of the problem because the cause will determine what treatment you will want to use. As always, I recommend isolating the ill betta for treatment if you have him/her in a community tank. While Swim Bladder Disorder isn't contagious, isolating the betta will make monitoring and treating the condition much easier on you (and will give the sick betta much needed "quiet time" to recover). If your betta is having a hard time getting to the surface for air, it is often a good idea to lower the water level to make things easier on him. Just remember if you do this that you have much less water volume than before and water changes must be increased to keep him in good health. Below is a list of things that can cause Swim Bladder Disorder, in order from most common to rarest.

Constipation - Constipation is the number one cause of Swim Bladder Disorder in otherwise healthy bettas. If your betta is showing symptoms of Swim Bladder Disorder, I always suggest treating the betta as if he has constipation first, because they usually do.

Overfeeding - If your betta is displaying symptoms of Swim Bladder Disorder immediately after feedings, and the symptoms tend to go away after a few hours, you are probably overfeeding. It is helpful to remember that bettas only have stomachs approximately the size of one eye, so try to feed smaller meals several times a day instead of one giant meal once a day. That is the treatment for Swim Bladder Disorder caused by overfeeding in a nutshell, not too hard, eh?

Injury - Sometimes bettas who have recently been through a traumatic experience (being dropped on the floor, being in a physical fight with another betta, etc) may display Swim Bladder Disorder symptoms. In these cases, many times there is permanent damage to the swim bladder.

Unfortunately this means that there is no real cure for the disorder if it is caused by injury, but you can manage the illness. Often bettas permanent swim bladder problems can live normal, healthy lives if accommodations are made - such as keeping the water level lower than normal to allow for

easier access to air, or providing large-leaved plants near the water surface to make a "lounging" spot where launching off for air is more doable for the betta. Swim bladder problems are not painful and are generally not fatal in the case of injury, so these guys have a wonderful prognosis in general.

Birth Defects - This is one of those rare and yet common causes. If you are a betta breeder, it is extremely common to get some fry with congenital swim bladder problems. If you are someone that "collects" bettas from petstores, it would be extremely rare to find a betta whose swim bladder problems are caused by birth defects as usually wholesalers that supply the bettas will destroy fish with birth defects before they ever make it to the store. As in the case of injury, birth defects are really not curable but they can be managed so that the bettas can live normal, happy lives...if less graceful lives than non-damaged bettas.

Bacterial Infections - While I have never personally seen a case of Swim Bladder Disorder caused by a bacterial infection, some fishkeepers that I respect very much have, and so I will list this as a possible cause of swim bladder problems if nothing else seems to fit. I have always heard that swim bladder problems caused by bacterial infections are incredibly difficult to treat, which makes me wonder if they are not caused by something else altogether...just my random musings. If you are convinced your betta's swim bladder problems are caused by bacterial infection (or are sure that none of the other things i've listed above could be causing it), you may want to start treatment with a good broad-spectrum antibiotic such as Kanacyn (Kanamycin sulfate), Spectrogram (Kanamycin sulfate and Nitrofurazone), Tetracycline, or Furan 2 (Nitrofurazone). Again, I have not ever witnessed a bacterial swim bladder infection, so these medications may or may not work and I would exhaust all other possibilities before treating with these medications.

Swim Bladder Disorder Prevention

Almost anyone who keeps bettas will have to deal with a swim bladder problem or two in their betta-keeping career. It is one of the top three betta ailments along with finrot and constipation. That being said, there are a few things you can do to reduce your betta's chances of contracting Swim Bladder Disorder in the future.

Swim Bladder Disorder is almost always caused by overfeeding or constipation. Remember that a betta's stomach is only about as big as his eye, and feed small meals several times a day instead of one large meal. Remember to feed bettas with nutritionally sound foods and don't go overboard on fatty foods such as bloodworms to avoid constipation.

Water quality is extremely important to keeping healthy bettas, tank maintenance is key.

Popeye Information and Symptoms

By Rachel Hunt (Mushi)



Image © Danelle



Image © Lois

Popeye is a bacterial infection generally caused by poor water quality, although it can also be caused by an eye injury that becomes infected. The main symptom of Popeye is that the eye starts protruding from the head, and if left long enough without treatment, the eye can actually fall out. Popeye is generally not fatal (unless it is not treated and the infection is allowed to spread), and with proper care, the eye will sink back into its socket when cured.

Popeye Treatment

If the fish is in a community tank, isolate him in his own container. This is not because popeye is contagious, but rather for the affected fish's safety and so that it can be medicated and the water quality monitored. If the fish is already isolated, do a water change immediately upon noticing the condition.

Because popeye is a bacterial infection, you'll want to treat it with a broad spectrum antibiotic. Recommended medications are: Ampicilex (Aquatronics), Penicillin, Maracyn 2, and Amoxycillin.

Follow directions on the medication you choose, but keep the fish's water absolutely sparkling clean during treatment (and afterwards, of course).

Popeye Prevention

Popeye is practically the easiest thing in the world to prevent simply by keeping the betta's water clean. Adding a teaspoon of dissolved aquarium or rock salt per gallon can also help prevent Popeye, but clean water is absolutely crucial. Popeye, along with fin rot, is a flashing neon sign that you are not keeping your tanks/jars as clean as they should be. If your fish ends up coming down with popeye, you need to start devoting more time to your tank maintenance.

Ick Information and Symptoms

By Rachel Hunt (Mushi)



A Betta with Ick - Image © Danelle

Ick is a protozoan parasite, and is extremely contagious. Ick will often appear when fish have been stressed by any number of environmental factors - new additions to the tank, rapid temperature swings, fluctuating water parameters, etc. My personal belief is that Ick is always present in an aquarium environment, but that healthy fish are able to fight it off until they become so stressed and worn out that they are no longer able to do so.

Ick symptoms are fairly straight-forward and easy to recognize. Ick will manifest itself visibly as white dots on the fish (generally the spots will start on fins and move towards the body, but not always). The spots will be about the size and consistency as a small grain of salt. Fish will often "flash" or scratch themselves quickly and repeatedly on objects in the tank in an effort to dislodge the Ick cysts. Some fish will continue to act normally even when infected with Ick, but others will have clamped fins, color loss and lethargy.

Ick Treatment

Ick is highly contagious, therefore if your betta is in a community tank, remove and isolate him. If you can move him to a tank with a heater, this will make treatment easier and faster - warmer temperatures will cause the cysts to fall off faster, which is the only time that they are vulnerable to medications (when they are not attached to the fish). Turning the temperature up to 84-86 degrees F will not harm a betta for the short duration of Ick treatment, and will increase the speed at which the fish will be cured. Do not try to put a heater in a small isolation bowl/jar, as you may end up boiling your fish. If you can't heat the isolation container because it's too small, try to place the

container in a warm area of the house and allow treatment to progress at its own pace.

There are a bunch of medications on the market that will successfully treat Ick, which you use is more a matter of how available it is for purchase than anything else. Most medications geared toward Ick treatment contain Malachite Green or copper. Commonly available brand names are: Malachite Green, Coppersafe, Quick Cure, Aquarisol, and Maracide. Pretty much any treatment that says it treats Ick probably will. Be aware that some of these medications are fairly harsh on plants and invertebrates, so make sure you do your homework before treating in a planted tank or one with snails/other invertebrates. Also be aware that strong copper-based medications can eventually lead to poisoning, so water should be changed frequently after treatment to remove the medications, unless you are treating in a container that gets 100% water changes.

Ick Prevention

Clean water, steady tank temperatures, and keeping your fish happy and stress-free fish are the easiest ways to prevent Ick. If you are adding new fish to a community tank, always quarantine them for at least 2 weeks to reduce the chances of the stressed-out new fish introducing diseases to your healthy fish. Always try to keep the tank temperature as stable as possible - heaters are the best way to do this if your ambient air temperature fluctuates a lot. I've personally found that rapid temperature changes are the biggest culprit when my fish come down with Ick - heat the tank if you're having severe temperature changes daily, and if your tank is too small to heat, buy a larger tank that can handle a heater. As with most of the other diseases, keeping up with your tank maintenance (ie keeping the water clean) is arguably the number one thing you can do to keep your fish happy and stress-free. Do not underestimate the power of clean water.

Fin Rot Information and Symptoms

By Rachel Hunt (Mushi)



A Betta with Finrot © Mushi

Fin Rot is arguably the number one issue you will have to deal with if you keep any number of bettas for any length of time. Fin Rot is a bacterial infection of the fins, usually brought about by poor water conditions and/or stress that causes the fins to deteriorate. Fin Rot can also set in when a fin is injured and the water is not kept clean enough to avoid infection of the injured fin.

Symptoms can include:

Small holes (pinholes) anywhere on the fins.

Fins that seem to be growing thinner or more transparent.

Fins that seem to be "fraying" around the edges.

Fins that seem to be breaking off in large chunks.

Slimey looking areas, usually on the tips of fins, that seem to "eat away" at the fins over time.

Fin Rot in and of itself is not contagious, but if you keep fish in a community tank you may end up with several fish contracting the infection. This is because the bacteria that cause Fin Rot are opportunistic bacteria - poor water conditions stress fish out, and when fish become stressed, their immune systems become weak. Weak fish are not able to fight off illnesses that healthy fish easily can. So if you have poor water conditions or something else causing stress in the occupants of your tank, you may have an "outbreak" of Fin Rot.

Fin Rot Treatment

Even though Fin Rot is not contagious, it is still a good idea to isolate a betta that you are attempting to treat for Fin Rot. There are several reasons for this, but the main reason is that it's much easier to keep the water absolutely pristine when you have a fish in an isolation container. The secondary big reason (maybe this should be first) is that many medications used to treat fin rot can kill your biological filtration, live plants, and may be harmful to other animals in your tank (depending on the medication and the other animals). It's also just generally a good idea to isolate any sick fish when treating them so that they are not getting picked on and there is no chance of passing any secondary infections on to other fish, as well as making it easier on you to monitor the health and progress of your fish.

Enough of the "isolate your sick fish" lecture (you're probably sick of it by now if you've been through other parts of this site, right?). Fin Rot is caused by gram-negative rod bacteria. Fin Rot can be easy to treat if you catch it early enough and maintain your water quality pretty well, or it can be a complete pain in the bottom if you don't catch it early enough or allow your water conditions to fluctuate over long periods of time (you know, we all get lazy every once in awhile).

If you catch your Fin Rot in the "pinhole" or "just starting to fray" stages, you may have good luck getting rid of it by simply increasing the number of water changes you do. If your betta is in a small, unfiltered tank, simply doing daily 100% water changes for a week may reverse the beginning stages of the illness. Adding 1tsp of aquarium/rock salt per gallon of water to the isolation tank along with doing daily water changes may also help take care of these bacteria in the very early stages.

Quick Medication Dosing Tip

Since most medication dosing directions are meant for larger tanks and some medications come in tablet or capsule form, it can be difficult to dose a small container. There is a trick to doing this.

If your medication calls for one capsule to 10 gallons, grab a small container that can hold water. Using a measuring spoon, measure out 10 teaspoons or tablespoons full of water into the container (it doesn't matter which you use as long as you use the same unit of measurement the whole way through). Dump the capsule or crush the tablet into the measured water. Then dispense the medicated water into your isolation container - if it is a 1 gallon container, one teaspoon/tablespoon will be the correct medication dosage. This method works for any size treatment container, just be aware that most medications lose effectiveness after 24 hours in water so you will have to discard any unused medication using this method.

Important Medication Note

Many Petstores will try to sell you a product called Melafix or Bettafix for the treatment of Fin Rot. In my personal experience, neither of these products (which actually have the same active ingredient, Melaleuca or Tea Tree Oil) will help with the treatment of true Fin Rot. They may help regrow fins damaged by Fin Rot once the bacteria is killed off, but they are not the right type of medication to actually "cure" Fin Rot. Treating with either of these products may stop the advance of the rot, but once you stop treatment it is almost guaranteed to come back. Don't be fooled into purchasing this medication as treatment for Fin Rot, although you can purchase it to use after you've cured the rot and just want something to prevent growing fins from being re-infected. End of lecture! If you notice that the Fin Rot is getting worse or is way past this stage when you notice it, it's time to bring out the big guns. Because Fin Rot is a gram-negative rod bacterial infection, you want to treat it with either a good, broad spectrum antibiotic or an antibiotic that specifically treats

gram-negative rod bacteria. My favorite medications to treat fin rot are "Jungle Fungus Eliminator" and Tetracycline. If you are unable to find either of these medications, other options are Maracyn II (you can use it in combination with Maracyn if you want to cover all the bases) and Kanacyn. Simply follow the dosing directions on the medication, keeping in mind that since you are treating in a small container you will have to do full water changes and add new medication instead of doing the partial changes many medications specify.

I personally like to continue treating with Fin Rot medications until I see good, solid fin regrowth (about 1/8"), even if that means I treat longer than the treatment schedule calls for. I do this because many times medications will stop the progression of the bacteria, but may not kill them all right away. If you stop treatment before all of the bacteria are killed off, odds are the Fin Rot will return as soon as you stop medication. Fin regrowth is an excellent sign that the bacteria have been taken care of.

If you run through 3 treatment cycles (usually about 15 days for most medications), you have kept up with the water changes, and do not see any improvement in the condition of the fins, you may want to switch to another medication. Before switching medications, give the betta a "med vacation" of about a week, changing his water (without adding any medicines) every day during that week before starting a new medicine.

Sometimes you will get a stubborn case of fin rot that nothing seems to help, or a betta that just seems prone to contracting Fin Rot over and over no matter what you do. If you run through several medications and nothing seems to help, you may want to just try 1tsp/gallon of rock/aquarium salt and daily water changes for a few weeks and see how he does. Sometimes we can so overmedicate our fish that the medications themselves start stressing them to the point they get sicker and sicker and stopping medications might be the most humane thing we can do. I've had extremely Fin Rot prone bettas do excellently with just daily water changes after all else had failed.

Fin Rot Prevention

Because Fin Rot is an opportunistic disease, keeping your betta in optimal conditions will greatly reduce the chances of him getting Fin Rot.

Always keep a betta's water so clean you could drink it (not that you'd want to, but...).

Always keep bettas at a good, steady temperature. Fluctuating temperatures or temperatures that are too cold (under 72 degrees F for long periods of time) or too warm (above 82 degrees F for long periods of time) can greatly increase the chances of a betta getting ill.

Feed a well-balanced diet to avoid nutritional deficiencies that can weaken the betta's immune system.

Velvet

By Rachel Hunt (Mushi)



A Betta with Velvet, Image © Lois

Velvet Information and Symptoms

Velvet is probably the second most common Betta ailment next to Fin Rot. Velvet is generally caused by unstable temperatures, or temperatures that are too cool for the betta to comfortably deal with (generally anything that falls below 72 degrees for long periods of time). Poor water quality can also increase a Betta's chances of contracting velvet. Velvet is the number one killer of very young Betta fry, so if you are a breeder, familiarize yourself with this disease so that you can diagnose it before it gets out of control in your fry tanks.

Velvet is a parasitic infection which attacks the Betta's slime coat. It generally infects the head and gill area first, so that by the time it is noticeable, the infection is pretty well established. The main indicator that your Betta has Velvet is a copper or rust colored dusting over the betta's body, normally beginning at the head, but it will very quickly spread over the entire body if not treated. Bettas that have Velvet will usually be very lethargic, have clamped fins, and may not be interested in eating. It is very important to treat Velvet as soon as it becomes apparent.

Velvet Treatment

If your Betta shows signs of Velvet, it is best to isolate him for treatment. If you are dealing with a Velvet outbreak in a fry tank, it is best to treat the entire tank. Do a complete water change if your betta is in his own container, and a 30-40% water change if it is in a community/fry tank and you must treat in the tank. Adding aquarium or rock salt (dissolve before introducing to the tank) will help until stronger medications can be purchased, and can be used in conjunction with medication. Many of the same medications that are useful in the treatment of Ick are also good Velvet treatments. Aquarisol is my personal favorite medication for Velvet, but Maracide, Malachite Green, and Coppersafe (as well as other copper-based medications) can be used. Be aware that strong copper-based medications can eventually lead to poisoning, so water should be changed

frequently after treatment to remove the medications, unless you are treating in a container that gets 100% water changes. Also be aware that some of these medications are harmful to plants and invertebrates, so do your homework before treating in tanks containing plants and invertebrates.

Once medications have been added, if at all possible, increase the tank temperature to 82-84 degrees F. This will speed the life cycle of Velvet and allow the medications to kill it faster. If your treatment container is too small to heat, allow the medications to work at their own rate but try to place the container in a warm area of the house. Keeping the tank dark will also help to destroy Velvet, as Velvet is actually a parasitic algae and requires a bit of light to survive. Keep an eye out for secondary opportunistic infections, as fish that contract Velvet are already in a weakened, vulnerable state.

Velvet Prevention

Stable (warm) temperatures and clean water are the two major things you can do to prevent Velvet in adult Bettas. In Betta fry tanks, or with adult Bettas that seem especially prone to Velvet infections, adding about 1 teaspoon per gallon of dissolved aquarium/rock salt can help prevent Velvet from setting in (when used in conjunction with stable temperatures and regular water changes). Aquarisol can also be used according to the directions on the bottle as a preventative, which I especially recommend for Betta fry tanks in which the fry are under one month of age.

Constipation Information and Symptoms

By Rachel Hunt (Mushi)



Photo © R. Hunt

Constipation, although terribly embarrassing, is a very common Betta ailment. Constipation is normally caused by the Betta being fed too many rich foods (such as bloodworms) and not enough fiber. Constipation can also become a recurring problem in elderly Bettas (sort of like people!).

Constipation is fairly easy to diagnose if you know what to look for. The most obvious sign that a Betta is constipated is the lack of any bowel movements, or very small bowel movements that don't match up to the amount of food the Betta has been eating. Since it can be quite difficult to catch a Betta in "the act," it may be necessary to diagnose constipation from secondary symptoms. These can include: a swollen tummy (the area right behind the ventral fins and right in front of the anal fin), loss of appetite (although some Bettas are such pigs that they will eat until they explode, it's a good indicator but not necessarily accurate), and, in later stages, fading color. Constipation will often go hand in hand with Swim Bladder Disease, as the intestinal blockages caused by being constipated can interfere with the operation of the swim bladder. If your Betta is showing Swim Bladder Disease-like symptoms, often the first thing to do is to make sure he's not constipated.

Constipation Treatment

The upside is that constipation is generally very easy to diagnose and treat, the downside is that, if left untreated, constipation can easily lead to death.

The first thing to do if constipation is suspected is to isolate the Betta if he isn't already. The reason you want to isolate the Betta is not because constipation is contagious (it isn't), it's because you want to be able to monitor his food intake and feces output. Before treatment begins, give him a nice water change. It is also helpful to leave the container bare-bottomed as it allows you to watch for any fecal matter he may be passing. If the Betta is showing signs of Swim Bladder Disease as well, you may want to leave the water level fairly low (4-5") so that he doesn't have to struggle to

the top for air. Right, on to treatment.

Number one, stop feeding him. I know he looks pathetic and he thinks he's starving to death, but Bettas can live for a very long time without food and it's dangerous to just let the food keep backing up inside him with no way to escape. The first remedy I like to try with constipated bettas is called "the Pea Trick." Take a frozen or fresh pea (you can use canned peas if you don't have access to fresh or frozen, but they do contain a lot of salt and the others are really preferable), and cook it until it's squishy. Peel the skin away, and break the "meat" into small, Betta-bite-size pieces. Do your best to tempt your Betta into eating some of them - tips on doing this include:

Drag your finger over the water surface to evoke their hunting instincts, and then drop the pea bit in one at a time.

Poke the pea bits onto the end of a toothpick and move it about like it's live food (be careful you don't poke the betta if you use this method).

Basically do anything you can to get that Betta interested in the pea.

Make sure you remove any pea bits that don't get eaten so they don't dissolve and foul the water (icky water = bad). Hopefully your Betta was interested in the pea, if he ate some of it just sit back and watch for a bowel movement in the next day or so. You can repeat "the Pea Trick" as often as he'll consume them (just don't go overboard with it).

If you can't get him to eat any pea or he doesn't seem to be passing anything after eating it, you can give an Epsom salt bath a shot. You may have noticed that I didn't advocate adding aquarium/rock salt this time, and there's a reason for this. Regular salt will cause fish to absorb more water. When you've got a bloated fish, you want them to excrete, not absorb. Epsom salt will get this done for you.

Setting up an Epsom Salt bath:

Add 1 Tbsp per gallon of Epsom Salt to some aged, temperature-adjusted (same temperature as the water the betta is already in) water.

Pour Epsom Salt solution into a container.

Place the Betta in the Epsom Salt bath for 15-20 minutes. While the Betta is having a bath, change the water in his tank so that he has nice, clean water to go back to afterwards. Make SURE that the water in all of these containers is the same temperature, we don't need the Betta getting another disease right now.

Hopefully the Epsom Salt bath will help to loosen the blockage, just sit back and watch. The Epsom Salt bath can be repeated up to two times a day - just be aware that it is stressful to the fish, so if you can get him to eat the pea, give the pea a shot first.

Constipation Prevention

If you keep Bettas for any length of time, odds are you're going to have to deal with constipation at least once in your career. The best way to prevent constipation is to feed a well-balanced diet, and keep the rich, fatty foods (bloodworms - number one culprit) as treats rather than as staple foods. If you feed a lot of frozen/freeze-dried foods rather than pellets, make sure you put some roughage in the diet as well. Peas, prepared as explained above, can be fed once a week instead of a regular meal as a preventative. You can also have one day a week of "fasting" (not feeding at all for a day)

in which the Bettas can clean out their systems.

Columnaris Information and Symptoms

By Rachel Hunt (Mushi)



Image © Danelle

Columnaris is commonly mistaken for a fungal problem, it is NOT a fungus, it is caused by *Flexibacter* bacteria. Columnaris can be particularly difficult to diagnose as there are many symptoms associated with it.

Symptoms can include:

White, gray or clear stringy-looking "fungus" hanging off the betta's body or fins. Again, this is not actually fungus, but the *Flexibacter* bacteria.

White or gray patches that look like mold or a slime covering, usually on the body (and most commonly around the dorsal area).

White "pimples," generally around the chin and mouth area.

White or gray tufts of "fungus" (often looks like cotton candy) anywhere on the body, but especially around the mouth, gills, or edges of scales.

Lesions anywhere on the body, generally beginning in the dorsal area. Redness and swelling are not uncommon.

In the later stages of infection, the bacteria will begin to eat away at the fish's scales, often leaving behind a red or brown looking bloody area surrounded by fungusy-looking tufts of bacteria.

The Betta may also have clear, stringy feces and may be lacking appetite.

Columnaris is highly contagious. Any fish in a community setting showing signs of Columnaris should be removed to a hospital tank and treated separately. A watchful eye should be kept on the fish remaining in the community for signs that they may be developing the disease.



"Rain" © EmmeyJade



"Rain" © EmmeyJade



Image © Rachel Hunt

Columnaris Treatment

Columnaris can be extremely difficult to treat, so it is recommended that medication be started as soon as the disease is properly diagnosed. As suggested above, remove the fish to a hospital/quarantine tank if it is normally kept with other fish. High temperatures will accelerate the course of the disease, so it is best to keep the affected fish at around 75-76 degrees F to slow the progression of the bacteria.

Columnaris is a gram-negative rod bacterium, and should be treated with an antibiotic that is effective against gram-negative bacteria or a broad-spectrum antibiotic. Kanacyn (Kanamycin sulfate), Spectrogram (Kanamycin sulfate and Nitrofurazone), Tetracycline, or Furan 2 (Nitrofurazone) are all good choices. I have also heard of people getting good results with medicated foods containing oxytetracycline, but if your fish is having problems with its mouth due to the infection, this may not be an option.

Columnaris Prevention

Columnaris is often a sign that your water conditions are not optimal for the fish. To keep water quality optimal and reduce the risk of your fish contracting Columnaris:

Avoid rapid, frequent temperature changes.

Do not overstock your tank. If you do overstock, be aware of what you're doing and keep up with the tank maintenance.

Do not overfeed. Rotting food adds to tank pollution, if the fish don't eat it, clean it up before it causes problems.

Feed the fish a variety of foods so that it does not have any nutritional deficiencies.

Always quarantine new fish for at least 2 weeks to reduce the chances of introducing a disease to a healthy tank.

Water quality is the most important step in preventing Columnaris, tank maintenance is key.

Fin And Tail Rot

From The Petfish.Net Betta Forum

Posted by: brandi

Posted on: Mar 24th, 2002, 2:38am

Hey guys,

Some of my bettas have recently become infected by fin/tail rot. A betta I bought apparently had it and it spread to several of the others...probably because I STUPIDLY used the same net on them. Anyway, I'm treating with Bettamax, but it seems to be working only very slowly. What medications do you all find work best on fin & tail rot? Tonight I bought some MelaFix, would it be okay to use that in conjunction with the bettamax? I just thought it might help heal the fins faster. I want to knock out this problem as quickly as possible...I HATE seeing their beautiful fins deteriorate. And yes, their water is kept meticulously clean.

One more question...is there something I can buy to disinfect their nets and tanks? Someone suggested bleach but I'd rather use a product made for disinfecting fishnets, etc. I can't find any at my local petstores, or any stores for that matter.

Thanks!
Brandi

Posted by: katie

Posted on: Mar 24th, 2002, 6:04am

Brandi, I have not had much luck with Melafix, It seems to work slowly on finrot, and then the finrot returned later, more than once. And I believe I change the water as often as I should. I have heard bettamax will do the trick and is better than melafix...Well here is what I did, I put in a tiny drop of coppersafe, to speed things up as I was really getting frustrated...and with the salt-and obsessive water changes, they seem to be looking great now....but I fear they will always be suceptible (sp) now....You know it is Blinky and Marduk I am having this problem with-and I had wondered why they were both getting it, and the others weren't -hmmm the net(never would have thought) but this goes to show, that some bettas are much stronger than others I suppose.

Well keep me updated, I would like to hear how it went with the betta max.

Thanks katie

Posted by: Lois

Posted on: Mar 24th, 2002, 9:21am

As far as nets--I bought a product called Net Soak by Jungle. Active ingredients are benzalkonium chloride and methylene blue. Says to keep the nets in the solution between uses, solution to be discarded if it gets cloudy. Also says no rinsing needed. Lot of "it says" there, but haven't actually used it. I got it a LFS, but it is available on line. Not generally available in my area, just this one store. Hope goes well for your fishes. My first fellow, Mr. Fishy had ratty, disappearing fins kept coming back for quite a while, but no fungus edge or red edge. Not absolutely sure it was fin rot, but could not figure what else it was. He was otherwise fine--good appetite and color, etc. Did finally clear up with BettaMax. He has since occasionally gotten what I think is just tailfin tears when he started spending time under a particular ornament. That clears up well with Melafix. Good luck!

Posted by: Chopin

Posted on: Mar 24th, 2002, 9:59am

Hi!

Good to catch fin/tail rot right away. I've had good luck with Maracyn II...it is about a week for the full course of treatment. Also--making sure there is salt in the water (aquarisol or something similar) has been

good for keeping my Betta beautiful. What are you conditioning the water with? Certain water conditioners can cause problems from what I understand. Good luck with the treatment!

Posted by: Chopin

Posted on: Mar 24th, 2002, 10:06am

oops--typo there--I meant to say AQUARIUM SALT not AQUARISOL

Posted by: Margaret

Posted on: Mar 24th, 2002, 10:20am

Hi, Brandi,

Hope this finds the bettas getting better! To add to what everyone is saying--Like Chopin, I had luck with Maracyn II for treating fin and tail rot... for the size of my tank I had to cut the tablets into slightly less than 1/4 of a tablet, dissolve the piece in water, and treat, I think, for 5 days. If Bettamax is an antibiotic, then I don't think you'd want to switch to Maracyn II right away, or you'd have to do it carefully. Let's see if anyone knows what to do about that... You might want to check out the petfish archives. I think I recall reading a case where someone switched antibiotics in the middle of treatment--I think I searched under "fin and tail rot" in the archives. I learned a lot from reading what other people went through. Also--aquarium salt at the rate of 1 tsp per gallon (some would say less) is usually helpful too. HOpe you have good news for us later on! Margaret

Posted by: Leslie

Posted on: Mar 24th, 2002, 4:55pm

Fin and tail rot on any fish is best treated with Maracyn II or Tetracycline. I have found the best to be Maracyn II, then Tetracycline, then Bettamax. Melafix and Bettafix are way too slow and fin/tail rot is not something you want to see deteriorate even more so while waiting on medication to kick in. This is a bacterial condition caused usually by poor water quality, probably why you think one of your bettas brought it in. Melafix is tea tree oil. Some people have luck with it, but I would assume in only the mildest cases.

Maracyn II will heal your fish in no time. All of the Mardel products have my thumbs-up! As you're already doing frequent water changes, just add the medication and salt, but it's best not to mix medications. If you've already started the Melafix, try it for a few days with the salt in the water 1tsp per gallon. If the infection doesn't get any better or worsens, do a water change and switch medications. I have a large dalmation molly who had a terrible case of tail rot. I medicated the tank with tetracycline and in 36 hours she was cleared of it.

Do you know what I use to disinfect my nets? Hot salty water or a solution of Melafix (it's the only thing I'll use the stuff for!)

Posted by: brandi

Posted on: Mar 25th, 2002, 12:32am

Thanks for all the replies...they were really helpful. It seems like a lot of you have been getting results with Maracyn 2. I just have to figure out how to switch from Bettamax to Maracyn 2.

I use Stress Coat....I hope it doesn't affect the bettamax.

Brandi

Posted by: Leslie

Posted on: Mar 26th, 2002, 7:27am

Stresscoat will not harm the maracyn 2, neither will salt nor carbon if you're running a filter. Do a water change, wait one day, then start the maracyn 2 if he's not any better.

I will give you one other option before you buy more medicine. Take a one quart container (or close to that) and fill it with de-chlor'd warm (80-82) water. Add 2 tablespoons of salt (it does not have to be completely dissolved). Put your fish in for no more than 2 minutes, then return him to a clean, de-chlor'd tank/bowl with the usual amount of salt for the tank's size. Wait one day and if the fin/tail rot is no better, start the maracyn 2.

Good luck!

Posted by: Leslie

Posted on: Mar 26th, 2002, 7:33am

Brandi, I forgot to tell you to remember to put in that stresscoat after the salt bath since that much salt will wipe out his slime coating. It sounds like a harsh treatment, but I've never had any bad results from it. If your fish is acting really weak from the rot, decrease the salt to 1 1/2 tblsp. The salt bath will kill any infection at the site of the rot, such as bacteria, fungus, or protozoal.

Posted by: doug

Posted on: Mar 28th, 2002, 1:07pm

twice now I have bred My Male Fireball with two different females. In both cases, I have conditioned the pair with live brine shrimp and frozen blood worms for a couple of weeks prior to spawning them. Then I placed him in a tank for a couple of days, set up with a few inches of water, a heater, a half of a styrofoam cup and a cycled filter turned off. After a day, I introduced the female in hurricane globe. After he built his nest and they showed interest in one another, and she started swimming nose down, I released her. They spawned and the bubble nest was filled with eggs. Both females, after spawning ate a few eggs, and after witnessing this I removed the female. So far so good.

In both cases, Fireball tended the eggs for the first 24 hours, picking them up and putting them back in the nest.

In both cases, overnight, he ate the majority of the eggs and destroyed most of the bubble nest. What am I doing wrong

Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Doug

Posted by: Clint

Posted on: Mar 28th, 2002, 5:23pm

That's a common problem, male eating fry. I would try leaving the light on 24 hours for the male with fry. The theory is that he forgets they are his after a night in the dark. There are so many things that can go wrong with a Betta spawn, it's really a wonder we can spawn them as much as we do.

Posted by: doug

Posted on: Mar 28th, 2002, 6:53pm

Thanks, actually tried that second go around. Perhaps he just got a taste and is no good for spawning. Will just have to get a younger let hungry male!

Doug

Posted by: brandi

Posted on: Apr 5th, 2002, 11:54pm

Thanks so much, everyone, for all your replies. Here is an update on the status of my fish who have been afflicted with fin rot. I was using BettaMax, which seemed to help alleviate the symptoms. However, there was still a slow deterioration of their fins....the Betta Max was just working too slowly. I hated watching their beautiful fins deteriorate. So....I tried the "salt bath," an idea given to me by Leslie's post. I wasn't sure if it had completely stopped the rot or not (since it had been progressing slowly after I started

Bettamax). So, I waited a day and started Maracyn 2. I am about to go give the fish their 2nd to last treatment. I'm also adding a little aquarium salt. I don't *think* I'm seeing more deterioration, but I'm not seeing new growth either. I hope the Maracyn 2 does the job. I just want to see those fins grow back I'll keep everyone updated.

Posted by: Leslie

Posted on: Apr 12th, 2002, 9:16am

Brandi,

Glad everything seems to be going ok. As long as you are not seeing more rot, then your betta's tail will grow back. It seems some fish can regrow a tail in 2 days, but others, especially long-finned ones, take a lot longer. Remember that your fish has had a lot of strong medications and his body has to rid itself of that first then he'll start to heal. I had a dalmation molly with the most disgusting tail rot I've ever seen. In 2 days of Maracyn 2 she looked completely well, and in 4 days you never would've guessed she had just had a rotten tail. I had a betta (my poor Rainbow) who lost some of his lower finnage in a fight. He had a salt bath, there was salt in his regular tank, he went through Bettamax (I thinkk it's too slow, too), maracyn 2, and still everytime that fish moved...I mean everytime he even swam a bit, his fins were flaking off all over. It was horrible. His brother, Blue, was very sick and both guys were getting old. Blue was also in a state of agony. These 2 bettas were huge...the biggest betta boys I've ever owned, and well, they did eat a bit more than the other bettas. Blue stopped eating never to start again. They were in a divided tank for most of their lives...."true brothers".....and I swear Rainbow was depressed about Blue. These were 2 guys that would always flare at each oher, look at each other, and never got tired of each other the way my other's have done. So, it was time for Blue to go, and I sent Rainbow with him. Blue went immediately to sleep and Rainbow fought it a little, but I think it was really more a more of a nervous system reaction than anything else. They were blessed with holy water as all my favorites are when they die, and buried side by side. That was on March 2nd this year and do you know that everytime I go by that tank, which is occupied by 2 hateful bumblebee cichlids, I still expect to see Rainbow and Blue in there. I always used to say "hey, boys" everytime I walked by. Of course, I sill miss my sweetest betta, Dominic, who died 9/17/01, and the best female betta ever (Miss Personality), Miss Plumb, who died 1/18/02. I guess sometimes you just never get over something that touches your heart. But that's why we try so hard to make them well when they're sick. I hope yours turns out ok. Give him awhile for the tail or fins to start growing back. Once you see that new little nub of growth, it doesn't take long from there.

Dropsy Information and Symptoms

By Rachel Hunt (Mushi)



Examples of Dropsy, Image © Danelle



Dropsy, Image © EmmeyJade

Dropsy is a serious, usually fatal disease. No one is sure of exactly what causes Dropsy, although there are several theories. One theory is that Dropsy occurs when kidneys fail due to a bacterial infection, causing fluids to build up in the body. Others believe that it is caused by viral, fungal, or parasitic infections, leading to fluid retention that damages internal organs. Seriously ill or weakened bettas are at the highest risk of developing Dropsy. The majority of bettas who show Dropsy symptoms will not recover, although there is a very slight chance that the fish may be cured.

Dropsy Treatment

The chances of survival with Dropsy are very, very low. Usually, by the time symptoms appear, internal organs have been far too damaged to be able to bring the fish back to good health. There have been reports of people curing Dropsy with the use of Tetracycline, Maracyn AND Maracyn 2,

Kanacyn, or broad spectrum antibiotic foods.

Epsom Salts added to the betta's water (at 1/8 teaspoon per 5 gallons of water) may help to alleviate the fluid retention, and make the betta more comfortable, but it will not cure the disease. Be aware the Epsom Salts contain Sulfa, so if you are treating with medications that are not compatible with Sulfa, do not add Epsom Salts to the water.

As always, when treating a sick/injured betta, keep them warm.

Dropsy Prevention

Dropsy is an opportunistic disease. The best prevention for it is to keep your bettas as healthy as possible to prevent it from gaining a foothold in the first place. Keeping the bettas in very clean water and keeping them within their optimal temperature range (76-80 degrees Fahrenheit) will help considerably. If your betta starts showing Dropsy-like symptoms, early, aggressive treatment is the best chance you can give them.

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