



Bird Nutrition

IMPROPER FEEDING IS THE CHIEF CAUSE OF DISEASE AND DEATH IN PET BIRDS

Good nutrition plays an essential role in the maintenance of a healthy bird. It has been estimated that 80–90% of bird diseases are related to an inadequate diet. Although the exact nutritional requirements of exotic birds have not been established, it has been determined that a dry seed diet alone is not sufficient. Even “vitamin enriched” seeds are deficient in calcium, iodine, amino acids, Vitamin A, B vitamins and other essential nutrients in addition to being too high in fat. Safflower seeds are no better than sunflower seeds.

In order to correct this problem, pelleted avian diets have been formulated to provide balanced nutrition for your pet birds. To supplement these diets, a variety of fresh foods should be fed on a daily basis. Birds have a poorly developed sense of smell and taste. The appearance and texture of food, however, will strongly affect what they will eat. Once birds become accustomed to a seed diet, anything different is usually approached with a great deal of skepticism. **DO NOT GIVE UP!** It often takes months to gradually change your bird's old eating habits to a more healthful one.

PELLETED DIET:

- A pelleted diet should provide the bulk (60–80%) of your pet bird's diet. Brands such as Harrison's, Kaytee (Exact), and Zupreem are designed to provide complete nutrition for your bird just as dog food is designed to provide complete nutrition for you dog. Harrison's pellets are completely organic and contain no preservatives.
- It may take time and patience to train your bird to eat this form of food, but the benefits to your bird's health and longevity far outweigh the negatives of the transition.
- When introducing new foods to your bird, feed new foods first thing in the morning since birds are hungriest when they wake up.

SEED:

- Seed should be kept to a minimum and offered only as a treat.
- Different types of seeds should be offered.
- NEVER feed any bird a diet of wild bird seeds!

FRUITS & VEGETABLES:

- These are a part of a balanced diet for a bird. Suggested vegetables are carrots, dark yellow squash, spinach, beet greens, broccoli, collard greens, peppers (even jalapeno) endive, tomatoes, sweet potato, watercress, asparagus, corn on the cob, yams (cooked), lima beans, and other legumes. Vegetables need to be thoroughly washed and can be fed raw or cooked, though cooking decreases some nutrients.

- Suggested fruits include apples, apricots, cantaloupe, papaya, bananas, grapes, mango, watermelon, and all citrus. Various juices and nectars may also be given in small quantities.
- It is important to wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly prior to feeding.
- Canned fruits and vegetables should be avoided due to a high sugar and salt content, which may tend to cause diarrhea or other health problems.
- Birds that begin eating fruits and veggies are taking in more water with their food than they have been. The resulting increase in urine output may look like diarrhea.
- Avocado can be toxic to birds and should never be fed.

PROTEIN SOURCES:

- All birds have a protein need. This may be met by feeding limited amounts of lean beef, chicken, fish, cooked eggs, cooked egg substitute, bean mixtures (legumes), tofu, whole grain breads, low or non-fat cheese and peanut butter.

VITAMINS, MINERALS AND GRIT:

- All birds on a seed diet should receive a daily supplement containing vitamins (including D3), minerals, and amino acids.
- Powdered vitamin formulations are best utilized when sprinkled on fresh food. When sprinkled on seeds most is wasted, and when put in the water, vitamins can encourage harmful bacterial growth.
- Minerals are essential and should be supplied daily in the form of cuttlebones, mineral blocks, oyster shell, or egg shell. A calcium supplement should be available, such as oyster shells, bone meal, dicalcium phosphate with D3 or a mineral block with calcium. Parakeets should also be supplied with a source of iodine.
- Many birds develop poor eating habits and border on malnutrition. One method of adding variety and interest is to include table food. Don't hesitate to try different foods. (Except those containing caffeine, such as chocolate or coffee. Caffeine is potentially toxic to birds.)
- Grit is unnecessary for all parrots. Finches and canaries can be supplemented with a pinch of grit once every few months. Too much grit can cause vitamin deficiencies and grit impactions.

BASIC RULES FOR FEEDING BIRDS:

- Remove any uneaten fresh food within several hours after feeding to prevent spoilage.
- Try to develop your bird's taste by introducing fruit juices--then start on the solid fruit. New foods and pelleted diets may be mixed with the seed diet during a transition to a healthier pellet-based diet.
- Do not overwhelm your bird by suddenly dumping a handful of table scraps in the cage. Begin with small quantities.
- Do not try to starve your bird into eating a new food. He/she may die in as little as 48 hours!!!

DISEASE:

Signs of illness in birds may include: change in stool, decreased appetite, fluffed feathers, sneezing or wheezing, decreased activity or vocalization, weight loss, or runny nose or eyes. Birds disguise disease very well. Therefore, once signs of illness are visible, the disease process is usually well advanced and immediate treatment is needed. If you think that your bird may be ill, keep the cage temperature about 85 degrees and cover the cage to avoid draft and allow rest. Do not clean the cage, but place waxed paper on the cage floor to collect a fresh stool sample and call for an appointment.