

## **DIETARY CONVERSION FOR YOUR PET BIRD**

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A quality, nutritious diet for most pet birds is comprised of approximately 50-75% of a quality pelleted diet and 25-50% fresh vegetables and fruits. Converting a bird from seeds to pellets can be challenging, but don't give up! Providing good nutrition is the single most important thing you can do for the overall health of your bird.

While there are a number of ways of converting your bird to a pelleted diet, we have found that the safest approach is to gradually change the diet over a period of time. In order to convert your bird to a pelleted diet, you will first have to determine how much seed the bird eats. We recommend at least one week of monitoring the total seed intake prior to the start of the new diet. Start out by measuring how much seed you place into the bowl in the morning and how much seed remains in the bowl at the end of the day. Subtract the remaining seed from the morning total to determine the daily "eaten" amount of seeds. Ignore any wasted seed at the bottom of the cage. Average the daily "eaten" seed at the end of one week to decide your bird's daily average seed intake. This is going to be the total amount of pelleted food that you will provide for your bird daily.

After you determine the average amount of seed eaten per day, then you can begin to convert your bird from his old diet to his new diet. There are many ways of accomplishing this. We recommend adding 25% new diet and 75% seed diet (only up to the total amount of the average eaten) for 1-2 weeks. Since the total amount of food that he will get is only the total amount he generally eats, he may be motivated to try the new diet, as he may be hungry after you begin feeding 50% new diet to 50% seed. On week 3-4 you will be feeding 100% pelleted diet (replacing all of the seed) with supplemental fresh vegetables and fruits.

Other suggestions to help with the conversion are to sprinkle a small amount of seed on cooked baked yams to get the bird to eat the yams. If the bird will eat the yams without seed, try sprinkling crushed pellets on the yams.

This method of diet conversion obviously relies on your bird eating the new pelleted diet. It is important to make sure that the bird does not starve himself during this conversion. Therefore, you will need to monitor your bird's weight closely. We recommend that you purchase a gram scale and weigh your bird daily. These can be purchased at an office supply store (used for weighing mail). Always weigh your bird prior to initiating a diet conversion, so that you have a baseline weight. Your bird should lose no more than 1-2% of his total body weight per week during the dietary conversion. If the bird is losing excessive amounts of weight please notify your veterinarian immediately as excessive weight loss can cause other health problems. It is always recommended to establish a good relationship with an avian veterinarian, and discuss any diet conversions prior to attempting a change.

Always buy only 100% pelleted diets. Diet mixtures containing both pellets and seeds allow your bird choose between the seed and the pellet in the mixture and to fill up on nutritionally deficient seed. Given the choice, we bet your bird will choose the seed out of the mixture everytime! This is like giving a child a plate of broccoli and French fries, and giving the child the opportunity to choose which they will eat for dinner.

There are a number of quality pelleted diets available to choose from for your pet bird. Some birds will accept one pelleted diet and not others so ask your veterinarian or pet store for samples of diets when available. Several brands of pelleted foods such as Kaytee, Pretty Bird, Mazuri, Lafeber and Roudybush diets are available through pet stores. You can obtain Harrison's Bird Diet through our hospital.

Supplemental fresh vegetables and fruits should also be offered to your bird (see "Healthy Shopping for Your Bird" fact sheet) Yams, carrots, squash, and orange bell peppers all are high in Vitamin A which is essential to the good health of your bird.