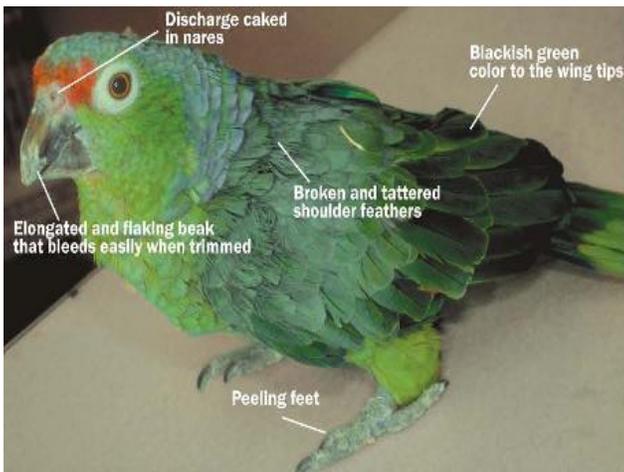


PARROT DIETS – NO MORE SEEDS!!

An unbalanced or incomplete diet is a common problem with pet birds, and a common cause of illness. A good diet for parrots begins with a formulated ration with a variety of other foods added as supplements. **It is clear that an all-seed diet is poorly balanced and unhealthy for most types of pet birds.**

Unhealthy bird (eating seeds)



Healthy bird



Seeds

For most pet birds, especially parrots and parakeets, a diet based primarily on seeds is deficient in many nutrients, including vitamin A and calcium, and is too high in fat. This is not to say that seeds do not have a place in avian diets, but many birds come to prefer them to the exclusion of other healthy choices and can be fussy when it comes to trying a varied diet. Some birds will even pick out a couple of favorites from a seed mix, which further reduces the nutritional balance in the diet. When it comes to parrot nutrition, consider seeds to be somewhat like junk food: birds love them, but they are not the healthiest choice. For most species of parrot, seeds should only make up about 10 percent of the diet. Some species, like budgies and cockatiels are naturally seed eaters and can tolerate a higher percentage of seed in the diet, but even for these birds, seeds should only make up about 25 percent of the diet.

Formulated Diets

A number of years ago, realizing that many parrots were suffering from nutritional deficiencies; companies began producing pellet diets for pet birds. These are made from a variety of foods including grains, seeds, vegetables, fruits, fortified with vitamins and minerals, and are baked into pellet or variety of other extruded shapes. These provide a balanced nutritious diet and prevent birds from picking out their favorite food items and leaving the rest. However, many birds, especially those started on a seed based diet, do not readily take to eating a formulated diet. Therefore, pellets can be considered the "base" of the birds' diet, comprising 50-60 percent of what the bird eats.

As we come to a better understanding of the nutritional needs of birds, the recommended diet for pet parrots includes a variety of nutritious freshly prepared foods in addition to formulated diets (pellets) and a small percentage of seeds. Remember that most freshly prepared foods will spoil readily, and should be removed from the cage after a couple of hours. If your bird is not readily accepting new foods, try offering them early in the morning or in the evening, times when birds naturally forage for food in the wild.

Before (eating mainly seed)



After (eating Harrison's & fresh food)



Vegetables

Fresh vegetables are a great addition to your bird's diet. Not all vegetables are equally nutritious though; vegetables like celery and lettuce are high in fiber and water but are otherwise not all that nutritious. Dark yellow and leafy green vegetables are usually excellent choices.

Try a variety of vegetables such as:

- Carrots (root and tops)
- Sweet potatoes
- Leafy greens such as collards, kale, turnip greens, mustard greens, Swiss chard, beet greens and dandelion greens
- Parsley
- Green beans
- Sweet red, yellow and green peppers
- Cauliflower
- Broccoli (head and leaves)
- Eggplant
- Sugar snap or snow peas
- Squash
- Romaine or green/red leaf lettuce (small amounts)
- Corn (kernels, or on the cob for larger birds)
- Cucumber

Remember: no avocado or rhubarb!

Fruits

Again, you want to feed a wide variety, not just a favorite few. Many birds love fruit and will overdo it so limit fruits to a fairly small portion of the overall diet. As with vegetable, many of the more deeply colored fruits contain more nutrition, and it is good to try feeding a variety of more tropical type fruits parrots might be exposed to in their native habitats.

However, make sure they do not eat pits or apple seeds as these can be toxic.

Try fruits such as:

- Mango
- Papaya
- Kiwi
- Berries
- Pomegranates
- Pineapple
- Cranberries
- Cantaloupe (without the rind), other melons
- Peaches
- Nectarines
- Apricots
- Bananas
- Oranges
- Cherries
- Pears
- Grapes
- Apples
- Grapefruit
- Tangerines

NOTE: When feeding pellets to your pet, do not over feed citrus fruits (including oranges) or vitamin-C-rich foods as this can lead to "Iron Overload Disease" Make sure your bird eats a good balance with other (non-citrus) fruits and vegetables.

Other Foods

Birds can also be fed a variety of nutritious grains, such as cooked brown rice, quinoa, oats, wheat, barley, and pasta. Whole wheat bread and unsweetened whole wheat cereals can also be offered. Cooked legumes such as beans, lentils, and peas are an excellent addition to their diets. Birds can also be offered small amounts of lean well-cooked meat and poultry and cooked eggs.

Sprouted Seeds:

Sprouted seeds are an excellent source of nutrition for pet birds Sprouted seeds are rich in vitamins and minerals as well as enzymes and antioxidants. Sprouts are an excellent way to provide a nutritional boost and most birds love them.

Vitamin and Mineral Supplements

Offer a cuttlebone (for extra calcium). Additional supplements should only be given on the advice of your veterinarian.

Many birds are less than enthusiastic about switching to pellets. With patience and persistence almost any bird will eventually accept a formulated diet as a significant portion of a well balanced diet. The transition to pellets may take a few weeks or a few months, and some or all of the following strategies may be used.

Most importantly: never try to starve your bird into eating pellets - this could be dangerous and definitely stressful. Make sure that your bird does not lose weight.

Never give the following: no alcoholic or caffeine drinks, chocolate, food containing MSG or salt or meat. You can feed a large parrot some boiled egg and a cooked chicken bone but no more than once a week. Do not smoke in the vicinity of your parrot or put them directly under the aircon

Transition Tips

- Ideally, start young birds on pellets, since young birds are usually much more willing to try new foods than older birds that may be "set in their ways."
- Never starve a bird into trying a new food.
- Make sure your bird is healthy when you switch diets.
- Experiment with different kinds of pellets - some birds like small pellets & others like large pellets
- Mix some pellets in with the seeds.
- Finely grind some of the pellets and sprinkle over the seeds or a favorite treat
- Try moistening the pellets, perhaps with warm water. Remove any moistened pellets after a couple of hours though, due to the risk of spoilage.
- Offering new foods first thing in the morning is helpful, since this is when many birds naturally forage for food, Try offering new foods alone first thing in the morning, and then offer the more familiar foods a couple of hours later.
- Try hand feeding the pellets so your bird thinks they are a treat.
- Pretend that you are eating some of the pellets and your bird might be tempted to try something he/she thinks is a special human treat!
- If your bird is not used to a variety of foods, introduce only a few at a time.
- If your bird is reluctant about switching to pellets, carefully monitor the number of droppings and the bird's body weight. If the number of droppings decreases and the birds body weight goes down, feed a little less of the new foods and offer more of the old diet.
- Remember there might be a change in the droppings (color, texture) when you feed pellets.

Schedule for the Transition

Ideally, your bird will readily accept the new pellets, and you could make the switch quickly using a schedule such as this:

- *Week one:* feed 75% of the calculated daily intake in seeds, and substitute pellets for the other 25%
- *Week two:* feed 50% of the daily intake as seeds and 50% as pellets
- *Week three:* feed 25% of the daily intake as seeds and 75% as pellets.
- *Week four:* reduce the seed component even more for larger parrots.

For many birds, however, the switch may need to be **much** more gradual.

Success

For smaller parrots such as budgies and cockatiels, once you achieve a diet that is just 25% seeds (25% seed, 50% pellets, and 25% fresh foods) you have succeeded! For larger parrots, once you achieve a diet that is about 10% seeds, 50-60% pellets and the rest fresh foods you have succeeded.

Making the switch may be difficult, discouraging, and time consuming. Just remember, your effort is really worth it and you will be rewarded with a healthy bird on a well balanced and nutritious diet.