



Why A Proper Diet Is So Important For Your Pet Bird

Malnutrition is the leading cause of illness and death in pet birds today. Poor and unbalanced diets can lead to illnesses affecting the respiratory tract, the digestive tract, the urogenital tract, and the skin and feathers. Giving your pet bird a proper diet is the best way to ensure that your pet bird will lead a healthy and long life.

The most common misunderstanding in avian nutrition today is that seeds offer a balanced diet. Seeds are a very poor diet. Seeds are High in Fat, Low in Protein, Low in Calcium and Lack Vitamin A.

Birds eat enough quantity to maintain their protein requirement. Since seeds are so low in protein, they must eat an overabundance, therefore causing the bird to consume too much fat. Over consumption of fat causes a bird to become obese which places undue stress on their joints. Additionally fat cells can infiltrate into organs and cause those organs to fail. Insufficient calcium can cause osteoporosis of the bones resulting in fractures. Calcium is also necessary for the muscles to contract. If calcium is lacking in a diet and therefore is low in the blood, many muscles can fail to contract normally which can lead to severe illness or death and heart muscle failure. Vitamin A is the nutrient which is responsible for keeping the epithelial cells healthy. This is the cell which lines the gastrointestinal tract, the respiratory tract, the urogenital tract and the skin. If these cells do not remain intact and healthy, infections can then be introduced into many areas of the body and result in severe illness or even death.

What is a nutritious diet?

A nutritious diet in wild birds consists of a wide variety of foods including insects, leaves, legumes, fruits and vegetables. One that mimics the wild bird diet in captivity consists of a mixture of 30% seed and 70% vegetables, meats, dairy products, nuts and fruits along with a vitamin supplement. To ensure your pet bird gets a proper ration, these ingredients should be mixed to the consistency of mash. It is a well known fact that if a bird is offered a variety of foods they will consume the seed first. Seed equates to candy and potato chips in children. All of us know that when a child is presented with candy and vegetables, the child will pick the candy first. Therefore it is easy to understand that unless a varied diet is mixed thoroughly, a bird will consume its favorite food before anything else. Realistically a bird will eat very little other than the seed when offered a variety of foods.

A pelleted diet or extruded diet is one in which the food manufacturer has formulated a complete diet and extruded it into a pelleted form. These pellets can vary in size, shape, and color. Some diets are all natural diets with no preservatives of which Harrison's Bird Diet is considered Top Brand. Other diets such as Kaytee, Zupreem, Pretty Bird, Rhoudy Bush, and Lafeber are considered to be very high quality formulated pellets which have been researched for over 25 years and have a longer shelf life.



How can I convert my bird to a nutritious diet?

Birds are creatures of habit. If a bird has been on a seed diet for a period of time it may be difficult to switch to a pellet ration, but is never impossible. Several methods are available for converting birds to a pellet ration:

1. Mix 1 tablespoon of pellet with 1 tablespoon of seed and offer this mixture for 3-4 weeks. After approximately 3 weeks, begin to decrease the amount of seed offered. During the 4th week, offer 60% pellet and 40% seed. Decrease seed by 10% every week and increase the amount of pellet by 10% weekly. After 8 weeks, you will be offering a 100% pellet diet. It is important to monitor the bird's weight during this conversion process. Gram scales can be purchased at many of the area's pet stores. You should also monitor your birds output of feces during the conversion process. There will be a change in both color and consistency but there should be no change in volume. If your bird loses more than 10% of its body weight during the conversion process, contact your veterinarian immediately. One day in a bird's life is equivalent to 7 days in a person's life. If a bird does not eat for 2 days, this can potentially be life threatening.
2. Crush the pellet into a fine powder and mix with water to form an oatmeal consistency. Then roll the seed through this mash, thereby coating the seed with the pellet mix. Offer this along with pellets for several weeks. When using this method, you must realize that when the pellets are mixed with water it can become rancid within several hours and it is important not to leave this mixture standing in a feed bowl throughout the day.
3. A method which is guaranteed to work rapidly but is very time consuming is the following:

Remove all food from your bird's cage. At daylight offer a small bowl of pellets for 2 hours. If the bird does not eat the pellets after 2 hours, then mix 1 tablespoon of seed and offer this mix for 1 hour only. Then remove all food until dusk. At dinnertime offer pellets for 2 hours. Again if your bird does not eat the pellets within 2 hours, add 1 tablespoon of seed to the mix and offer this for 1 hour. Then remove all food. Always leave the water in the cage. Repeat this process the following day. Most birds will convert within 1 week. You must closely monitor your bird's weight and amount of droppings that are produced during this method of conversion.

Once your bird is converted to pellets you can offer a variety of human foods. It is important to stay away from such foods as avocado, rhubarb, asparagus, eggplant, onions, olives, parsley, spinach, mushrooms.



Here is a complete list of Human foods that should be avoided as these are considered **poisonous** to your pet bird they are:

Avocado, Asparagus, Rhubarb, Eggplant, Onions, Olives, Parsley, Mushrooms, Spinach, Apple Seeds, Pear Seeds, Apricot Pits, Peach Pits, Cherry Pits, Plum Pits, Raw Peanuts, Caffeine, Alcohol, Chocolate and Carbonated beverages.

Salty and Sugary foods and butter are not healthy food choices and should be avoided.

If you have any questions regarding avian nutrition, please feel free to call one of our avian technicians or your local veterinarian. They will gladly assist you with your questions or concerns.

Also it is highly advisable to keep your pet bird away from all indoor houseplants as some of these are very toxic to birds.