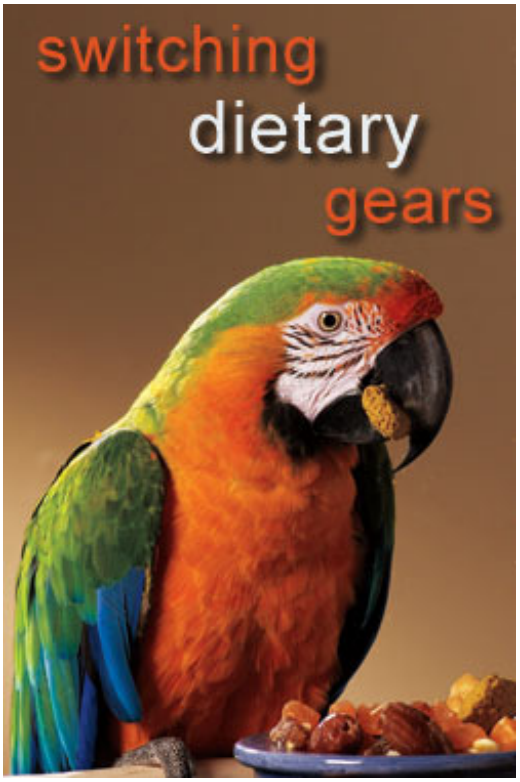
How to Switch Your Bird's Diet: Slow and Steady

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Nutrition is the watchword for taking care of your bird. A balanced diet is a necessity to allow a bird to live a full and healthy life. An unbalanced diet is the main cause of disease and early death in pet birds. Malnutrition is a human-made disease. Fortunately, it is also treatable by changing the diet.

For most pet birds, a balanced diet consists of 65-80% formulated diet, about 15-30% vegetables, and the rest can be fruits and nuts. Some species such as lories and hyacinth macaws have very special dietary needs. Be sure to consult with your avian veterinarian to know what diet is best for your bird. If your bird is currently eating a seed-based diet as her primary source of nutrition, it is a good idea to convert her to a formulated diet.

Feeding your bird correctly is not difficult, but knowing when and how to switch from a not-so-healthy diet to one that has optimum nutrition takes some know-how. We have compiled a host of tips we recommend in order to switch your bird from a poor, seed-heavy diet to a healthier, more varied diet.

1. **Have Your Bird Examined**
   Have your veterinarian examine the bird to make sure she is otherwise healthy and able to handle the diet change. Also, be sure to discuss any special dietary considerations your specific species of bird may have. If your bird is overweight, your veterinarian will be able to tell you what her optimal weight should be.

2. **Select a Pelleted Diet**
   Work with your veterinarian and your bird to determine which formulated diets are appropriate nutritionally and also palatable. Some birds prefer pellets, others crumbles or smaller pieces. Some will prefer brightly colored pieces. It is often a good idea to buy small quantities of several brands and mix them together as you attempt converting the bird to the new diet. This will give her more variety down the road when she is converted.

3. **Begin the Conversion**
   Many owners begin by mixing some of the pellets with their bird's old diet. Owners of larger birds often will pretend to eat a few assorted pellets themselves, saying "mmmmmmm," then offering one to their bird to try. Birds are social eaters and will often copy what humans and other birds eat. Since many smaller birds, such as parakeets, are ground foragers, you could spread out a mixture of 2-3 formulated varieties of pellets on a towel and take your bird out of the cage and set her on the towel. Then, begin to peck at the pellets, paying little attention to your bird. Most small birds will soon begin to peck at the pellets after watching your cue. Once your bird is eating the pellets, continue to offer them, preferably right away in the morning when she is the most hungry. Then, offer any seed that should be included in her diet later in the day. Continue to offer fresh foods while making the conversion. Steadily decrease the amount of

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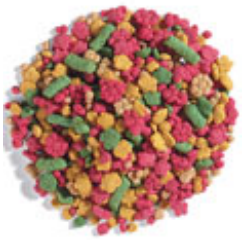
seed you offer as she eats more pellets.

Other tips for making pellets more attractive to your bird:

- Tuck a few in your bird's toys or accessories so she has to "fish" them out
- Hold off on commercial treats during conversion; try hand feeding the pellets as a treat, instead
- Offer pellets in a variety of shapes, colors, and textures
- Offer pellets when your bird is outside the cage so she associates them with fun
- Mix pellets with shredded newspaper or very small toys so she has to forage through the inedibles to get to the food

4. **Don't Expect Change Overnight**
   Some birds will convert easily, within a week. Others will take up to a month to make the switch. The length of time it takes is not as important as the change itself - getting your bird off of a seed-based diet is one of the most important things you can do for your bird's health.

Pellet Diets



Exact Rainbow Diets
Grab your bird's attention with an enticing rainbow of colors in a variety of shapes and textures.

Pretty Bird
Provide your bird with a dynamic and fun feeding experience.

Lafeber's Daily Diet
Each pellet contains all the nutrients your bird needs for a full, energetic, and healthy life.

Roudybush Rice Diet
An ideal diet for birds with food allergies or sensitivities.

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