
**AVIAN & EXOTIC CLINIC
of the Monterey Peninsula**

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CONVERTING YOUR BIRD FROM SEEDS TO PELLETS

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Why do I need to change my bird's diet?

A diet that is predominantly seed is nutritionally inadequate. No matter what is claimed in advertising campaigns or on the back of packaging, seed diets lack the nutrients your bird needs to stay healthy. Birds on seed diets have substantially reduced lifespans and weakened immune systems that make the likelihood of costly medical bills much greater.

There is no doubt that birds like the taste of seeds. Seeds taste good for the same reason French fries taste good: they are both high in fat. Parrots are like young children in that, when given a choice, they will eat what tastes best rather than what is best for them. It is up to you, their caregiver, to make sure that what they eat is nutritious as well as appealing.

Is it more effective to change the diet gradually or suddenly?

In our experience, gradual diet changes don't work well. Birds are creatures of habit, and if given a choice they prefer to eat familiar foods than to try something new. In addition, gradual diet changes can take a long time, and many owners lose patience and give up before their birds are converted.

How can I encourage my bird to try the new diet?

In the wild, birds learn which foods are safe to eat from watching their parents. In the home, birds look to their owners for guidance regarding new foods. If you make an excited fuss about your bird's new diet, and show your bird that you think it's just yummy, he is much more likely to accept it readily. On the other hand, if you frown and look apprehensive about his new diet, he will be more reluctant to try it. It can also be very helpful for your bird to spend the day observing other birds that already eat pellets.

How long will it take for my bird to eat the new diet?

Some birds will begin eating a pelleted diet immediately, while more stubborn birds may take a few weeks. The important thing is not how quickly it happens, but that your bird is ultimately converted to a nutritious, balanced diet. The major reason people don't succeed in changing their bird's diet is a lack of patience. Don't let this happen to you. The benefits will last a lifetime.

What if my bird throws a temper tantrum when I offer him his new diet?

Some birds will engage in screaming and throwing fits when their familiar seed is removed and pellets appear in their food bowl. Macaws and cockatoos are particularly guilty of this type of manipulative behavior. The best way to nip temper tantrums in the bud is to ignore them. Be patient; your bird will eventually cease and desist.

How do I know if my bird is eating his new diet?

The best methods of evaluating whether your bird is eating his new food are direct observation of his eating habits, and monitoring the amount and character of the droppings he produces. If your bird won't eat pellets in front of you, look for ground up pellets in the food dish or on the floor of the cage. Change the cage papers each morning, so that each day's droppings can be evaluated. The number of droppings a normal bird should produce varies with the size of the bird: a budgie will produce 25-50 stools a day, while a macaw will produce only 8-12.

Normal droppings consist of three parts: the urine portion (clear liquid), the urates (chalky white material), and the feces (green to brown and formed). If your bird's droppings consistently do not contain the fecal portion, then it is likely that your bird is not eating.

If my bird won't eat the diet, should I starve him into it?

Under no circumstances should you let your bird starve. Birds have very high metabolic rates, and will become ill if they go without food for a prolonged period. If your bird hasn't eaten in 6 hours, offer him fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in addition to his pellets. If he still refuses to eat, give him back his regular diet and contact your veterinarian for further instructions.

If your bird is particularly stubborn about trying his new food, or you are finding the conversion process nerve-wracking, your veterinarian can convert your bird for you. Most birds convert to a new diet much more quickly when placed in a novel environment, such as a veterinary office. If you are interested in having us change your bird's diet for you, give us a call.

Should I feed my bird fruits and vegetables as well as pellets?

Fruits and vegetables can add interest and diversion at mealtime. Concentrate on offering fruits and vegetables that are high in vitamin A, such as carrots, cooked sweet potatoes, and leafy greens. For most birds, fruits and vegetables should make up no more than 15% of the total diet consumed. Refer to the handout in your new client folder for the vitamin A content in common fruits and vegetables.

Which pelleted diet is best for my bird?

The best diet for your bird will depend on a number of factors, including his species, body condition, age, reproductive status, and health. Talk with your veterinarian about which diet is best for your pet.

