



Exotic Animal Hospital of Philadelphia

WHY FEED PELLETS TO YOUR BIRD?

Parrots in the wild feed themselves on fruits, seeds and nuts that they can find. According to the season the source may vary and they therefore get a varied and balanced diet.

In captivity, people feed parrots, sunflower seeds, peanuts and sometimes some fruits and vegetables. After several years this leads to severe health problems and can result in early death for the pet.

In the wild, most larger species of parrot live for 40 to 70 years. In captivity, the average age is 15 years!!! The majority of these parrots die young because they have been fed a totally inappropriate diet for most of their life.

Seeds and peanuts are detrimental to a parrot's health for several reasons:

1. **Vitamin A deficiency:** This type of diet is totally deficient in Vitamin A. Vitamin A plays an important role: it contributes to the health and function of all tissues such as skin, respiratory tract & digestive tract. If vitamin A is deficient, the bird's defense against any bacteria or virus is lowered. Many infections are actually primarily due to a vitamin A deficiency. Treating these infections with antibiotics alone will not cure your parrot; it will relapse and get chronically sick, unless you change its diet to a more balanced diet.
2. **Excessive Fat:** Excessive amounts of fat provided by seeds and peanuts leads to fatty degeneration of the liver and ultimately liver failure, heart disease, fatty tumors.
3. **Low Calcium:** The calcium content is low in seeds and peanuts, which leads to other health problems such as problems laying eggs and fragile bones that can break easily.

Two options are available to improve the diet:

1. Home-made diet – this is NOT ideal

This diet contains various food items that are normally consumed by humans, such as vegetables, bread, corn, and some protein source such as eggs, cheese, beans and nuts. However, a lot of parrots are so fussy that they will select their favourite food item (which may not be the healthiest component!) and the resultant diet will still be unbalanced.

2. Formulated diet (pellets) + Fresh vegetables

We advise that you feed your bird a commercially prepared pelleted diet. Harrison's bird diet and Zupreem bird diet are commercially available and formulated to provide balanced nutrition for birds. Either of these pelleted diets are a good choice for your bird. You can add variety by giving many vegetables, some fruits and occasional high quality nuts (such as almonds and walnuts). The pellets should represent 70-80% of the diet

- Vegetables: All dark green vegetables such as bak choy, choy sam, and spinach are a good source of calcium. Fruits and vegetables that are high in vitamin A are red, yellow and orange in color and include carrots, sweet potatoes in small quantities, but **avoid avocado** as it is toxic to birds.
- Small amount of healthy nuts (ideally in their shell) and a some seeds as a small treat:
 - Almonds: They are a good source of healthy fats, protein, and vitamin E.
 - Walnuts: Rich in omega-3 fatty acids, walnuts can provide beneficial nutrients for parrots.
 - Brazil nuts: These are high in selenium, which is important for parrot health in small amounts.
 - Pecans: Pecans contain antioxidants and can be a tasty treat for parrots in moderation.
 - Pistachios: A good source of vitamin B6 and antioxidants, pistachios can be given to parrots as an occasional snack.
- It's important to note that nuts should be given to parrots in moderation due to their high fat content. Additionally, always consult with a veterinarian to ensure you are providing the appropriate portion sizes and considering any specific dietary requirements your parrot may have.

Remember to wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly before feeding to your parrot as pesticide residues are very toxic to birds.

TIPS TO CONVERT YOUR BIRD TO PELLETS

Think of your bird as a spoiled child that has been fed ice cream for years! You will have to be firm! The pellets will not be as tasty as the fatty seeds and peanuts but they are healthier!

The first step is to allow your bird to realize that the new food item is edible. For pellets, this can be accomplished by crushing the pellets and sprinkling it over a favorite moistened food item that they currently love to eat (such as rice, pasta, any vegetable or fruit). Sometimes adding small amounts of guava juice to the pellets may encourage the bird to taste the pellets.

However **do not** leave pellets wet for more than a few hours as it will allow bacterial/fungal overgrowth.

Once you see that the bird has tasted the pellets, mix the pellets with the seeds and peanuts. Gradually reduce the volume of seeds and peanuts and increase the amount of pellets over six weeks.

If this fails, you may have to offer the new pellets for 30 minutes 2 or 3 times each day, instead of leaving food available all day. This is best done in the morning when the bird is hungry.

Another option is timed feedings: allowing your bird their regular diet at a certain time of the day for a short period of time and the rest of the time, offer pellets only.

You may also try playing with pellets and present to be eating them yourself

While you are converting to a pelleted diet, it is important to monitor your bird's feces. Make sure that they are always producing feces. If they are not producing feces, this means that they are not eating and they will need to be offered more of their original diet. If your bird develops diarrhea, please stop giving the pellets and contact your veterinarian.

Please note that if you are feeding the colored Zupreem pellets, your bird's feces will change colors - this is normal

Do not give up - most birds take up to 1 month to convert. It is essential to your parrot's good health and long life to feed the correct diet.

