

How and Why to Switch Your Bird to a Pelleted Diet

by Dr Greg Burkett

Board Certified Avian Veterinarian

Why?

Diet is the most important factor in your bird's life. A poor diet can be the underlying cause of many health problems. Feeding pellets as 80% or more of the total diet will guarantee that your bird has a balanced and complete diet.

Feeding pellets will also:

1. Improve health and appearance by supplying vitamins and minerals that are deficient in seeds. Seeds are deficient in over 30 different important and vital nutrients. Pellets are 100% complete and balanced.
2. Provide consistent quality and cleanliness by using high quality ingredients and processing to eliminate harmful bacteria and fungi.
3. Prevent waste and mess by providing a 100% edible product and eliminating the 40-70% of inedible hulls and fillers that make up seed mixes.
4. Eliminate guesswork - Pellets are formulated specifically for the needs of your pet bird, so you know that your bird is getting everything need for a balanced and complete diet.
5. Up-to-Date knowledge and improvements - Pellet diets were developed through decades of field research in pet bird nutrition

How?

Pellets are the only diet that can offer complete and balanced nutrition. Your bird's diet should be at least 80% pellets. The remaining 20% can be any treat. Fruits, vegetables, pasta, rice, beans, seed, and many other foods are acceptable treats. Persistence is the key to a better diet for your bird. You must first believe that you are doing the best for your bird. If you will follow this method your bird will be eating pellets in two to four weeks.

1. You need to have two food bowls in the cage. One bowl should be near the highest perch. The other bowl should be lower, near the cage bottom. In the high cup put pellets. The pellet bowl is to stay in the cage as the high bowl at all times. In the lower bowl put seeds, or your bird's current usual diet.
2. When giving seeds in the lower dish, give only enough seed that can be eaten in one sitting. I recommend giving only 1 tablespoon of seeds. Fill the pellet bowl half way.
3. Seeds or the current diet are to be given in the morning and in the evening only, Afternoon, the seed bowl is removed, and a non-seed treat is offered. This treat can be any of the above mentioned foods. If your bird does not eat other foods, another dish of seed should be given. The process will take longer if this is the case. Do Not Mix Pellets With Seeds.

4. A routine should now be established: Small amount of seeds in the morning and evening, a treat in the afternoon, and pellets available at all times. Maintain this routine for 1 week. Meanwhile, observe your bird to see if he is consuming the pellets.

5. When you notice that he is eating pellets, then discontinue the seeds in the morning. Instead, give pellets in the lower bowl (and in the higher bowl), give the treat in the afternoon and give the evening seed meal, but give fewer seeds at this time.

6. Continue to observe your bird and weigh him if possible. If you determine that your bird is consuming pellets consistently and maintaining his weight, then we recommend that you discontinue the seeds completely and continue monitoring

7. Utilize the following coaxing hints to assist you in this conversion.

Some Helpful Hints to Coax Conversion:

A) It helps to role-play with your bird when you are trying to get him to try new things. You can pretend to be eating the new food and that you are very excited. Then offer some of it to your housemate in front of your bird. When you see your bird is interested, then offer him some.

B) Birds prefer to eat in flocks. At meal times bring your bird out of the cage to dine with you. Have a bowl of pellets at the table to offer your bird and to pretend to eat and pass around to the other flock members. Your bird can also be given some of your table food at this time.

C) A bowl with a mirror behind it can be a great tool. Use this bowl for the pellets in the high spot for finches, stubborn budgies, and other small birds. Once the conversion is made the mirror can be removed.

At this point your bird can be considered to be on pellets. You should wait for at least several days before giving seed as a treat until you know there is full conversion without fear of de-conversion back to seed.

Some Important Points to Consider:

A) It is very important to monitor your bird's droppings during and after the conversion process. If the droppings turn to a dark green or black, then it is an indication that he is not eating enough. At this point give a little more seed or the bird's usual diet, and simply prolong the converting process.

B) The droppings will change during the conversion. This should not be alarming. The droppings may become loose or watery and may change color. These changes are temporary, but, if they persist, then call your avian veterinarian.

By converting your bird to a pelleted diet, you will be adding several years to his life span and enhancing that life by preventing many nutritionally related health problems. Your bird will look and act healthier. The feathers will be brilliantly colored with fewer stress marks. In short, putting your bird on pellets will be the best thing you can ever do for you bird.

Dr. Greg Burkett Author: A graduate of North Carolina State with a BS degree in biology. He went on to earn his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from North Carolina State. He went on with post DVM training specializing in avian medicine. He sat and passed this examination by the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners in Avian Practice earning Diplomate status in November, 2002. Fewer than 100 veterinarians can claim that status.