

Converting Your Seed-eating Bird to a Pelleted Diet

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One of the best ways you can care for your bird is to feed a nutritious diet. Although many birds eat seeds in the wild, the seeds you buy at the store have very little nutrition and lots of calories. So instead of seeds, the optimal diet for your bird consists of about 50-75% of a quality pelleted diet and 25-50% fresh vegetables, fruit and other healthy "people" fare (see a separate handout for that). Conversion from a seed-based to a pellet-based diet is usually a challenge, but it **can** be done!

Start by buying a 100% pelleted diet. The diets that contain both seeds and pellets allow your bird to pick out only the seeds. This is akin to giving a child a plate of broccoli and potato chips and waiting to see which she chooses! There are lots of great pellet products on the market. Each brand is available in various sizes, and some offer foods for a bird's different life stages. Unless indicated otherwise, the following brands of pellets can be found in stores or online:

- Harrison's Bird Diet (available only from a veterinarian)
- Zupreem (colored or natural)
- Roudybush
- Kaytee Exact (colored or natural)
- Lafeber's
- Mazuri

The safest way to switch over from seeds to pellets is to do so gradually. It is **not** a good idea to go "cold turkey," since some birds will refuse to eat and can become very sick or even die. The first thing to do is estimate how many seeds your bird is eating daily for about a week. You can do this by measuring the amount of food offered in the morning and the amount left at the end of the day and subtracting the difference. Don't count the seeds on the bottom of the cage. Once you have a daily average, you should give only that general volume of dry food during the conversion.

Next, let's look at the actual conversion process. Start by putting 75% of the old diet (seed or seed/pellet mix) and 25% of the new diet (pellets) in the food cup and offer this mix for 1-2 weeks. Since your bird will likely want to fill up with the daily average volume of dry food, he'll need to eat both seeds and pellets to do so. By week 3, change the mix to 50% seeds and 50% pellets. Finally by week 4, you should offer 100% pellets supplemented with veggies and other healthy people foods.

It is obviously very important that your bird continues to eat during the conversion. The best way to monitor this is to weigh your bird daily for the first week or two. You can buy an inexpensive gram scale, either a postage scale used to weigh letters and packages (from an office supply store) or a food scale (from a kitchen supply store). First, make sure to weigh your bird **before** you start the diet conversion. Your bird should lose no more than 1-2% of his weight each week during the conversion period. If your bird is losing more than this, contact your veterinarian right away.