

Nutritional Care for Parrots

Introduction

Proper nutritional care is one of the most important factors in your bird's overall health. The information provided in this pamphlet is not exhaustive and we recommend to always contact your avian veterinarian for the most current and species specific nutritional care for your bird.

Bird Nutrition = Variety

A proper diet for your bird is providing a variety of formulated pellets, fresh vegetables and fruits, sprouts, and using seeds and nuts for treats. (*Lorys, Lorikeets, and Eclectus diets will differ*)

There are several kinds of formulated pellet diets available on the market and we suggest talking with your avian veterinarian to choose which kind of pellet will be nutritionally best for your species of parrot.

An example of daily nutrition for your bird can be fresh "chop" (mostly vegetables and some fruit and sprouts) for breakfast and then pellets offered in the afternoon.

Small parrot species (ex: parakeets, parrotlets, lovebirds, cockatiels) can have kidney problems if their diet is only pellets. It is recommended they do have a variety of seeds balanced into their pellet and fresh "chop" daily.

"What vegetables and fruits can I feed my bird?"

Most vegetables and fruits are safe and healthy for your bird. If it's healthy for you, it's healthy for your bird. Similar to a human diet, a bird's diet should have mostly vegetables and a smaller portion of fruit. The key is to feed all fresh produce raw, not cooked. Always wash your produce first!

Foods High in Vitamin A

- sweet potato
- carrots
- kale
- spinach
- swiss chard
- turnip, collards, & beet greens
- winter squash
- pumpkin
- butternut squash
- sweet peppers
- mango
- papaya

Foods High in Calcium

- broccoli
- figs
- raw almonds
- white beans
- kale
- turnip, mustard, collard, & beet greens
- bok choy

Toxic Human Foods

- chocolate
- caffeine
- alcohol
- avocado
- highly salted foods
- onions, garlic, chives, scallions/green onions, shallots
- xylitol (artificial sweetener)
- fruit pits from the *Prunus* family (peaches, cherries, plums, apricots)
- any food with marijuana.

Let's Talk About Those Seeds...

Feeding your bird an all seed diet will result in malnutrition. An all seed diet will lead to vitamin and mineral deficiencies, obesity, immunosuppression, ill health, and a greatly shortened life expectancy.

"But my bird loves to eat seeds, how can that be bad?"

A bird's natural instinct is to eat all the fattiest foods first for survival in the wild. Thus, if you constantly supply them with seed, they will always eat them first and not need to try other healthier foods.

"So, I can't feed seeds at all to my bird?"

Seeds and nuts can and should be used as treats for training and foraging. They do have essential fats and oils (like Omega 3 fatty acids) necessary for a balanced diet. But seeds and nuts should not be more than 10% of their daily diet.

Changing Diets Tips & Tricks

Before starting a major diet change, take note of the following:

- not all parrot species are best on a formulated pellet diet (consult your avian vet)
- patience is key—it can take weeks, months, or a year for your bird to totally accept new foods
- your bird's droppings can change in color, size, and consistency during a diet change
- never try a diet change with a sick bird or if they are experiencing multiple stressors
- weigh your bird several times weekly while changing their diet to make sure no more than 5-10% loss of body weight

Strategies for Changing Diets:

-Restriction of seeds: estimate how much seed your bird eats daily and only offer 50% of that amount and the rest of their daily diet will be the new food.

-"Flock" Feeding: As a flock animal, your bird will look to you for what foods can be safe to consume. You can try eating (or pretending to eat) the new diet in front of them enthusiastically. But never offer your bird food that has been in your mouth, human bacteria can harm your bird.

-Novel Area Feeding: Introduce new foods in high interest areas in the cage, like by a favorite perch or toy, or outside of the cage. For ground foraging birds, like parakeets or cockatiels, introduce new foods on a flat surface like a table.

-Interval Feeding: Only offer a restricted quantity of seed for 20-30 minutes, for 2-3 times per day. The new pellet diet is available constantly throughout the day. Once the bird is used to this timed feeding of seed, stop offering seed in the morning and limit it to just 1-2 times later in the day. Then eventually change to offering seed just once per day and then eventually stop offering seed once they are comfortable eating the pellet diet.

FAQ about Parrot Nutrition

How do I sprout seeds?

- “How to” video for sprouting: https://youtu.be/7KXJb_92Fb8
- Resources for sprouting: <https://www.chinaprairie.com/>

What kind of nuts can I feed my bird?

We recommend offering tree nuts raw to provide the maximum health benefits. Roasted nuts will lose some of the important fats, oils, and minerals while being cooked. Raw tree nuts are a good source of Omega 3 Fatty Acids. Soaking these raw tree nuts for 8 hours brings out the bioavailability of the nutrients making them more digestible.

- Walnuts
- Pecans
- Brazil Nuts
- Pine Nuts
- Filberts (hazelnuts)
- Almonds

Should I add supplements or vitamins to their daily diet?

Only if directed by your avian veterinarian. A balanced, varied diet will have the nutrients required for the average parrot.

Does my bird need a cuttlebone or grit?

No parrots do not need a cuttlebone or grit. Even though cuttlebones offer a source of calcium, parrots cannot properly digest this type of calcium and they do not help with trimming your bird's beak. Parrots do not need grit. Only birds like doves and finches (not in the parrot family) use grit to hull seeds in their crop. If a parrot is offered grit, it can cause their crop to be impacted.