



Medical Center for Birds

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Diet Adjustment

An overabundance of food, foods high in fat and calories, and too many food choices can all lead to the perception of a “land of plenty”. This perception can lead to overconsumption, obesity, hyperactivity, reproductive stimulation, a decline in desire of your bird to interact with you or it’s “flock”, and a decrease in your ability to use food rewards for training and positive behavioral reinforcement. Here are some things to adjust in your bird’s diet...

- ☐ Conversion to a pelletized or formulated diet (medium and large parrots): with the bird sharing time with you from its training perch, eat (or act like you are eating) the food in front of your bird. Make sure that you really enjoy the food item, and show your enjoyment to your bird. Offer some to your bird, but do not necessarily try to force the issue. Give them a limited time to accept the offer (a few seconds). If they don’t take it, keep “eating” the food and make it obvious that you are enjoying it. Once your bird is eating the pellets during these “foraging session,” you can begin to offer pellets as the primary food choice in your bird’s dish. This will open up many opportunities for “treats” to be used as positive reinforcement and training tools in the future. Once the birds are regularly consuming a pellet diet you will notice changes in their droppings that they pass. The droppings will generally be larger and lighter in color than when on seed
- ☐ Conversion to pelletized or formulated diet (cockatiels, budgies, lovebirds): It may be important to have your bird’s wings clipped unless they are very tame, in order to allow for foraging activity training into a new diet. Spread a variety of choices of the pellets out on a table surface covered by towel, and set your bird down on the table. Use your hand to simulate a scratching and pecking flock member. Pick at the pellets, crunch them in your fingernails, and flick them about. Once your bird begins to eat the pellets consistently, you can replace its old diet. You may want to simulate foraging, using your fingers, in the food bowl in the cage as a final conversion training method as well. Since these species are ground-feeders, it may help to offer the pellets on the floor of the cage or in a flat dish instead of in a bowl. Even then, be sure to monitor your bird’s droppings to ensure that they are eating well. Once the birds are regularly consuming a pellet diet you will notice changes in their droppings that they pass. The droppings will generally be larger and lighter in color than when on seed. If you only see scanty, dark green feces or black feces, your bird may not be eating and will need to be offered its old diet again.
- ☐ Offer vegetables: These should be restricted to just 2 or 3 types of vegetables at a time to avoid the perception of abundance. A frozen vegetable mix (e.g., corn, diced carrots, and peas or beans) is a convenient way to accomplish this. Just thaw out a small amount each day. Select items from the refrigerator can also be used – but they do not all have to be provided every day.
- ☐ Restrict other foods: Regularly offering softened or warm foods can simulate regurgitation—a pair-bonding activity. As such, this activity needs to be curtailed in most settings. The good tasting things that your bird likes – let the bird work to earn them, through training positive reinforcement or foraging activities.