

Methods of Transition to Pelleted Diets from Seeds

Information for the Pet Bird Owner

Cold Turkey Method

This method tends to provide the quickest results, but it is not for the faint of heart or for those who have little bird knowledge. Like the name suggests, this process requires that you stop feeding seeds entirely, and replace them with pellets and other foods. It also requires that you monitor your bird *very closely* to see that he is eating and not losing too much weight. If you chose this method, you should have a gram scale to measure your bird's weight daily. Because a bird's metabolism is so fast, they lose weight very rapidly when they don't eat. Unlike a human or dog that can go days without sustenance and suffer little more than an aching belly, parrots deteriorate very rapidly without food.

While it is true that most birds will let their willpower breakdown before they starve to death, this is not true of all birds. For this reason, an owner must closely observe their bird for signs of lethargy, illness and/or weight loss. If you do not have a gram scale, and are going to try this conversion method, we can weigh your bird for you at no charge.

Budgies (i.e., parakeets) and cockatiels tend to be among the most stubborn when it comes to food conversion.

If not already done, a complete physical examination and perhaps blood work should be done before starting this method.

In general, a bird cannot lose more than 10% of its body weight before risking dangerous results.

Procedure: Start off with clearing all food from your bird's cage. Then in the morning give your bird the recommended amount of the pelleted feed in their food cup. Leave it there for 20-25 minutes then remove it.

Allow the bird to have no more food until supper.

At supper repeat the 20-25 minute feeding with the pelleted food.

Your bird will not starve in a day.

If the bird is still not eating the next morning but seems fine otherwise, try one more 20-25 minute feeding. Most birds will start to nibble on their pellets at this point.

If they don't eat, allow them access to their regular food for 20 minutes then remove all food from the cage until supper.

If they are still not eating, give them their old food for 20-25 minutes.

The next morning, start again with the pelleted food.

Sometimes softening the pellets with water helps palatability.

Advantages to this method: This method is very fast. For birds that are initially stubborn, but smart enough to not let themselves starve to death, this may yield the best results.



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The Problems: There is a very good chance of severe weight loss here. Progress, food intake and weight loss must be carefully monitored. Any complicating factor such as an asymptomatic illness can have disastrous results (so a pre-conversion veterinary checkup is essential).

Slow Switchover Method

This is perhaps the most common and certainly the safest method. Basically, it requires that an owner slowly wean their bird off of seed and on to pellets and other "stuff." The process usually followed is that an owner offer a bowl mixed initially with 3/4 seeds and 1/4 pellets. This is just so the bird gets used to seeing the new food and associating it with something to eat in the food bowl. Some birds may even pick at the pellets (although some may throw them out of the bowl, as well). This mixture should go for about 1 week. Next, you should mix the seeds and new foods half and half. Again, maintain this ratio for about 1 week. Next, give your bird 3/4 pellets and 1/4 seeds for about 1 week. Finally, fill your bird's dish with entirely pellets. Over the month of the conversion, give your bird a second food bowl full of dark green fruits and veggies, beans, cooked brown rice, pasta, grains, etc.

Your bird may not touch these foods for a long time. Eventually, however, most birds become curious and may start to "play" with the new soft foods. This play often leads to eating when the bird learns how good the strange-looking new foods taste.

Advantages to this method: The slow conversion method is very safe. It offers your bird time to get accustomed to seeing the new foods before it is required to eat it. We need to remember that birds are prey animals. As such, they are very suspicious of unfamiliar things. Parrots may need to observe things like toys and foods before they actually use them. This method allows for this. Also, since foods like processed pellet squares and macaroni pasta are not something birds instinctively see as food, this method allows them time to visualize these things with a food that they know, seed. Hopefully, they will start to associate the new foods with the joy of eating they derive from seeds. Also, with a slow conversion method there is little chance of rapid weight loss if your bird refuses to eat anything but seed, because seed is always available, although in slowly decreasing quantities.

The Problem: This method is not perfect. If it were, it would be the only one we needed to know. First off, it takes a very long time. Second, because birds are very smart, they can also be very stubborn. There are those birds, especially cockatiels and parakeets, which will eat around all the new foods, picking out only the seeds. Expecting that more seeds will be forthcoming, they will eat only seeds even as the stock dwindles day by day. It is almost as if they expect that if there are any seeds at all, it is not even worth trying to find sustenance in any other food. For bird such as these, the key truly is, again **patience**. Most birds can be converted; it is usually simply a matter of whose will is stronger, the bird or the owner.

Miscellaneous

Some bird food companies make transition foods. One example is NutriBerries by Lafeber's. These are complete and balanced and may be used instead of a pelleted diet. For larger birds they can be more expensive than a pelleted food.

Current thinking is that pelleted food should only be about 80-90% of the birds diet by volume. The rest should be a variety of people foods such as vegetables, fruits, etc. Birds on 100% pelleted food may be more prone to kidney disease.

Avoid avocados. They can be toxic to some birds.

Many manufacturers now have website ordering. This can be an inexpensive way to order food as opposed to a pet store. Here are some of the more premium foods websites:

Harrison's - <http://www.harrisonsbirdfoods.com>

Lafeber's - <http://www.lafeber.com>

Zupreem - <http://www.zupreem.com>

Roudybush - <http://www.roudybush.com>

Harrison's Pet Food is a major brand that is organic and pesticide free.