



Zoo, Avian, Aquatic and Unusual Pets
Veterinary Consultancy

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Psittacine (Parrot) diets

The topic of parrot diets is always evolving and we encourage you to use this as a guide alongside researching as current up to date information as possible.

It is important to understand that birds will eat to satisfy their energy requirements rather than to satisfy what their body requires for correct nutrients. This means a bird eating a high seed or nut diet will satisfy their energy requirements quickly but they will fail to meet all of their nutritional needs. Thus, leading to nutritional problems.

General recommendations:

It is difficult to fully replicate a wild diet as wild parrots will feed from a variety of plants, seeds, nuts and fruits throughout the year; the availability of each varying according to the season and location.

It is generally recommended to feed your parrot a **pelleted mixture** which has been formulated to provide a balance of all the essential nutrients your parrot requires. These include the macronutrients; fat, carbohydrates and proteins and the micronutrients; vitamins and minerals. These pellets also help stop 'selective feeding', whereby a parrot will only eat a nut or seed of their choice which leads to nutritional deficiencies.

Alongside this pelleted diet a mix of vegetables and fruits can be offered to provide variety and enrichment to your parrot. Please note that fruit and vegetables still do not contain all of the essential nutrients your bird requires and a 'fussy' bird that may only eat a certain fruit or vegetable will definitely require a fully formulated pellet as part of their diet.

To encourage your parrot to move onto a formulated diet will take time and patience.

Tips to move your parrot onto a new diet include:

Offer a small amount of their usual food in the morning for approx. an hour and then remove this from the bowl. Replace with the new pelleted diet usual place in the cage - this confirms that it is 'food', rather than a toy. Make this the only food that is available to them during the main part of the day. In the evening, serve their usual food again. The next day, give your bird their usual food for less time in the morning and evening (30-45 minutes). The third day, reduce the time of their usual food again. Finally, on the fourth day offer only the new food.

Pretend to eat the new diet in front of your bird first, be sure to enjoy it before offering it to them.

Feed at mealtimes so that they are eating 'with' you.

Warm the new diet if possible.



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Give your birds lots of praise and encouragement when they pick up the new diet, even if they do not eat it at first. Parrots often pick up on our emotions and will use this to determine if a new food is safe.

Seed and Nut diets:

These are extremely high in fat making them very tasty and will always be picked by the parrot if they are given a choice of food. Consuming just seeds or nuts until they are full. This will lead to obesity and therefore multiple health problems if the diet is not changed.

As mentioned above seeds and nuts do not contain all of the essential nutrients a parrot requires to stay healthy meaning they will suffer from deficiencies if not offered alternatives.

This does not mean seeds and nuts cannot be fed. They are useful aids in training your bird, providing enrichment and sometimes medicating your bird. They should be used sparingly alongside a well-balanced nutritional diet.

Any seeds and nuts offered should be fit for human consumption as there have been reported cases of poor-quality seeds and nuts causing *Aspergillus* spp. in parrots (an upper respiratory disease).

Alternative diets:

If your parrot refuses to move onto a pelleted diet then the following should be offered:

Soaking pulses (chickpeas, haricot beans, black-eyed beans and mung beans) until they have sprouted, rinsing them thoroughly and regularly throughout soaking and then mixing them with 'meaty yellow' and 'leafy green' vegetables.

This provides sources of protein, carbohydrate and vitamin content.

Meaty 'yellow' vegetables include:	Leafy green vegetables include:
Yellow bell peppers Butternut squash Carrots Cauliflower Parsnips Sweet Potatoes	Broccoli Spinach Dandelion greens Kale Fennel Asparagus

Supplements:

If your parrot moves onto a fully formulated pelleted diet there should be no need for extra supplementation. However, this can be a case by case basis. Please speak to your vet for further advice on this if required.



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Calcium:

Traditionally calcium would be provided in the form of a calcium block or cuttlefish. These can still be offered and if your bird does use them they can help to keep their beak trimmed down. However, a lot of birds have no interest in these block forms of calcium and so a supplement must be given. We recommend either the calcium supplements Zolcal D, a liquid form that can be placed directly into your birds beak, into drinking water or on top of food; or Nutrobal, a powder form that can be sprinkled on top of your parrots food.

More on these products can be found here: <https://www.vetark.co.uk/products/bird-wildlife>

To utilize calcium from the diet birds require activated vitamin D3. Vitamin D3 is activated by UVB light from natural sunlight or the use of an ultraviolet bird lamp.

Here is a useful link for further information on and the use of UV lights for birds:

<http://www.arcadiabird.com/uv-lighting/>

The giving of further supplements should be discussed with your Veterinary surgeon.

Human Food

Many owners enjoy sharing their food with their parrot. If the correct food is given in the correct manner this is not always a problem.

Do not give food to your parrot from your mouth to their beak. This is considered part of a mating bond and will create confusion and behavioral issues for your bird. This can lead to stress and health problems such as feather plucking and baldness in the future.

Do NOT feed:

Dairy products (birds lack the correct enzymes to digest dairy)
High fat or sugary sweets (donuts, cake)
Avocado
Chocolate
Caffeine products

How much to feed?

Remember the amount of food you will offer your bird will depend on their size, whether you have a small budgerigar or a large Hyacinth macaw, however the general principles of their diet will remain the same. If feeding a formulated pellet diet the amount of food to offer your bird will be on the packaging or please ask us for advice.



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Further information on specially formulated diets can be found here:

<https://www.hbf-uk.co.uk/why-harrisons/why-formulated>

<https://lafeber.com/pet-food/bird-food/classic-nutri-berries/>