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FEEDING FOR A HEALTHIER BIRD

If you ate only potato chips and water your whole life, how healthy would you be? That's about the nutritional content of most seed diets! Seed diets are high in fat and low in nutrients. In the wild, seeds would only comprise 10%-20% of a bird's diet and would actually only be available to the birds at the end of the growing season when fresh fruits, vegetables and insects are no longer as available to them. In the wild, birds have the ability to burn off these high fat contents with daily long flights, migration and survival. In a pet home, birds just have no use for all that fat. Consequently pet birds have a tendency to develop fatty tumors and fatty liver disease, greatly reducing their life span.

Pet birds have longer life spans and overall better health and plumage when fed pellet diets, fresh cooked foods, fresh vegetables, fruits and breads. Although the specific nutritional requirements for each species of bird are not known, we do know that they require many of the same nutrients as other animals. Pellet Diets are designed for the needs of pet birds. They are low in fat and high in nutrients, reduce the risk of fatty tumors and fatty liver disease and they are a lot less messy than seed hulls thrown everywhere. Fresh cooked foods offer the birds variety of texture and flavor and vegetables, fruits and breads are just plain good for them.

So how come most birds are raised on seeds? Well, for many years, seeds were the easiest and most available convenient diet. These days, as we learn more about our own nutritional needs we have also learned more about our pets. Some breeders are now moving to pellet diets, yet many birds are still being raised on seed diets. We hand raise cockatiels and the first solid food that we introduce to them is pellets, but unfortunately since most people are only familiar with seed diets, we do allow them seed also. When birds from other breeders arrive, we immediately start introducing them to pellets and all sorts of fresh and cooked foods. We highly encourage all our customers to continue to wean seeds out of the birds' diets. We carry a large assortment of pellet diets and cooking diets for you to choose from.

i.e. :

Lafebers Premium Daily Diets (all pellet sizes)

Lafebers Nutriberries (all pellet sizes)

Lafebers Avicakes

Roudybush Maintenance Diets (all pellet sizes)

Zupreem Fruitblend (all pellet sizes)

Crazy Corn Cooking mixture (all flavors)

Now the trick is getting the birds to eat them! Let's face it, if you gave a child the choice between potato chips and vegetables, which do you think they are going to choose? The following are some tricks of the trade for getting them started on pellet diets. Be patient, you could be at it for months. The outcome, though, will be a healthier, happier bird.

1. Start by mixing the seeds and pellets 1/2 and 1/2 for a few weeks.
2. Use pellet and seed treats, such as Lafebers Nutriberries and or Lafebers Avicakes.
3. Use a smaller or larger pellet size than that which is recommended for your bird. This worked for our pionus who had been on sunflower/peanut mix for over 30 years. She mistakes the pellets for peanuts.
4. Use brightly colored, sweet and interesting shaped pellets such as Zupreem Fruitblend .
5. Once you are reasonably certain that your bird will eat the pellets, remove the seeds at night. Birds are always very hungry at first light in the morning. If they have started to accept pellets, then they will be willing to eat them when the seeds are unavailable. For awhile you will want to put the seeds back in the afternoon, just to make sure they have eaten enough.

DO NOT TRY TO FORCE A BIRD TO EAT PELLETS COLD TURKEY.
If they do not recognize pellets as a food item, they can starve themselves.

Here are some tricks for feeding fresh vegetables and fruits, cooked foods and breads:

1. "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence." Try hanging fresh foods on the outside of the cage so that the bird can just reach them through the bars.
2. Birds are greedy. If they see you eat it, they will want it also. Try feeding it off your plate.
3. Try feeding it out of your hand.
4. Try different presentations, such as chopped, strips, or whole.
5. Broccoli upside down clipped to the inside of the cage can encourage the bird to try to preen the little buds thus encouraging him to eat it.

The following is an approximate outline of the 4 basic food groups for most pet birds.

1. GRAINS, BREADS AND CEREAL GROUP

Approximately 50% of the daily diet can be selections from this group. These items are rich in vitamin B (*which are contained in seed hulls that birds do not eat*).

Suggestions: whole wheat bread, cooked brown rice, monkey biscuits, other whole grain products.

2. FRESH VEGETABLES AND FRUITS

As much as 45% of the diet can contain vegetables.

Suggestions: broccoli, endive, carrots, parsley, pumpkin, winter squash, collard greens, sweet potato.

Only small amounts of fruit should be offered making up the last 5% of the diet in combination with the last 2 food groups.

Suggestions: papaya, cantaloupe, apricot, apple, pear, kiwi.

3. MEAT

Less than 5% of the diet should be comprised of meat (*for protein and fat*).

Suggestions: beef, chicken, tuna, other fish, hard-cooked or scrambled eggs, peanuts, navy beans, kidney beans.

4. DAIRY

Although birds will enjoy small amounts of yogurt, cottage cheese and hard cheese, overdoing is not suggested. The calcium needs must be met, especially if the bird is still consuming a lot of seeds.

Suggestions: cuttlebone, oyster shell, mineral block, calcium supplements added to food or water.

FRESH DAILY, CLEAN WATER MUST BE AVAILABLE AT ALL TIMES!

Some other food items that can be a source of fun for birds are:

whole nuts, berries, buds and leaves, pine cones, corn on the cob, coconuts.

Many people like to feed things fresh from the garden and yard. It is very important to remember to rinse these items thoroughly and to make sure they are pesticide and fertilizer free!

GRIT-There's still a lot of controversy as to whether or not a pet bird should be allowed grit. For most birds it is probably not necessary but a little now and then won't hurt.

INSECTS-Many finches and even larger birds will enjoy some live insects in their diet.

Finches especially enjoy mealworms. Insects are a protein and fat source so make sure not to overdo.

SPECIAL DIETARY REQUIREMENTS-The above information is designed for the most common pet birds, but there are other species that have very specific dietary requirements, such as lorries, lorikeets, toucans, mynahs and pekin robins. For these types and other special needs birds, please follow their own food guidelines.

CAGE-A clean cage is also very important for the health of your bird. Birds love to play with things they should not, including rotten food and their own droppings. The floor of the cage should be covered with something safe and easy to clean, such as: paper towels- which can be changed daily and a good way to monitor the droppings for health changes
Carefresh shavings- a recycled virgin newspaper, which can be changed weekly and droppings and spoiled, soiled food removed daily. Carefresh is available in many colors and is great for nesting baskets and boxes,

We do not recommend corn cob bedding, which can, if moist, grow a fungus that can be very unhealthy for the birds' lungs.

IF THESE ITEMS ARE NOT AVAILABLE WHERE YOU ARE, WE WILL BE HAPPY TO MAIL THEM TO YOU. JUST GIVE US A CALL.