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Proper Nutrition for Your Pet Bird 2022

For a number of years, pet bird owners have been misled that a “premium seed mix” is the best way to feed your pet parrot family bird, canary, or finch. In addition, it is still quite common for stores, websites and some veterinarians to recommend fruits (North American) in addition to “table food.” These recommendations result in the absolutely worst nutrition your pet bird could ever have.!

Seed Mixes: Primarily fat and starch, deficient in essential proteins, vitamins and minerals. No seed mix provides adequate nutrition, no matter how much you pay for it or the marketing testimonials attached.!! **NO SEED!!**

Fruits: (North American): Actually serve to make the malnutrition of a seed diet worse, providing little nutrients of value. While some authors advocate that pet birds require Vitamin C, this is not universally accepted. What the fruits provide is a high phosphorus and sugar content. Phosphorus is also high in seeds and serves to exacerbate the frank calcium deficiency caused by seed and fruit diets. ! **NO FRUITS EXCEPT TROPICAL!!**
Mango Papaya

NO Table Food/“Fresh Food”: Forty three plus years clinical experience with birds has shown that the typical bird owner lets their pet eat whatever pleases them, from the kitchen. These choices tend to be high carbohydrate and fat items- like bread, pasta, crackers, nuts, cheese, junk food, snack food etc. The pet bird is not the athlete that his or her wild counterpart is. These empty calories are mostly no better than a seed mix and tend to contribute further to liver and cardiovascular disease.!

Well, then what?: Since the early 1980’s, formulated diets have been available as an answer to the tragic malnutrition above. In the pet trade, these products are often referred to as pellets, even though most are not pellets and none are labeled as such. We prefer to call them bird chow or bird food and to refer to **seed mixes as “death diets” and certainly NOT bird food.** The formulated diets have progressed mostly to reliable and beneficial products for your pet bird. This author is not fond of the colored versions- not that they are harmful, just that birds can see color and be selective AND the food color can pass in the droppings, resulting in alarming assessments, resembling a disease or disorder.!

Brands of Merit: Organic doesn’t necessarily mean better, safer, nor more nutritious but some of the good products out there are organic: **Harrison’s Lifetime Bird Diets**, some Kaytee products. Other good product include **Roudybush**, Zupreem, Kaytee, **LaFeber.Exotic Tropical Fruit pellets!** **Some pet chains and online**
In addition: the best items to give your bird from the pantry that provide entertainment are: kale, collard, and mustard greens What about a little seed or nuts? Frankly most pet birds should receive little or no seed. Macaws are okay with some nuts and the healthiest nut to feed is almond.!! **(see other side)**

Bird Illnesses Caused by Malnutrition (abridged from lafeber.com)

Liver Disease

This is a common problem avian veterinarians see in pet birds, either based on blood tests, ultrasound, or post-mortems. The most common is hepatic lipidosis or fatty liver. A seed diet, a lot of sugary fruit, empty carbohydrates, and animal fats contribute to this. This can be reversed to some extent but often isn't diagnosed/realized until advanced disease has occurred.



Reproductive Disease

High fat diets stimulate hormones causing egg production. Ironically a seed diet provides poor building blocks for egg production, whether or not the owner wants eggs. This can lead to life threatening abdominal problems, requiring life saving surgery. Bones are subject to fracture.



Vitamin A deficiency

A common and classic problem in pet birds on seed diets. Respiratory infections, kidney disease and an increase in certain types of cancers are commonly seen.

Neurologic Disorders

A variety of trace nutrients are absent in seed mixes. The result can be nerve damage, tremors and seizures

Cardiovascular Disease

Research has shown that African Greys, Amazons, and Cockatoos typically have this by 10 years of age on a poor diet. Lack of exercise makes it worse. Major vessels get narrowed or clogged with **atherosclerosis**, leading to heart, kidney, liver and brain disease. A "perfectly normal" parrot can simply drop dead with advanced disease, which is usually easily explained by a thorough post-mortem examination. Various diagnostic tests early can help identify and correct some of these health problems. Seven year old African Grey Heart shown.



Skin Diseases

Many skin, and oral diseases arise due to a primary chronic Vitamin A deficiency. This includes skin cancer, infections, some feather problems. Virtually all skin cancers in birds seem to correlate with chronic Vitamin A deficiency. Overgrown beaks are mostly due to malnutrition and liver disease. **Healthy parrots mostly never need a beak trim in their life.**

