

## **Corn, Bean, Rice, Pellet Diet**

The following are instructions on how to prepare a good basic diet for most hardbill birds ranging in size from finches to macaws. The diet was originally described and formulated by Dr. Raymond Kray, an avian veterinarian in Burbank, California. This will provide your pet with a high protein, high carbohydrate, low fat diet that is much healthier than the low protein, high fat seed diets traditionally fed to these birds. In addition to this basic formula, it is recommended to supplement your pet bird with fresh fruits, vegetables, greens, and protein foods (such as cooked egg, cooked meat and dairy products). Your pet should also be provided with a source of calcium for healthy bone maintenance, such as cuttlebone, mineral block, dried crushed egg shell, or a powdered calcium supplement mixed with the food. A powdered vitamin supplement should also be sprinkled over the diet when placed in the cage. This basic diet is particularly useful in the treatment of birds with fatty liver disease, dull or poor feathering, and obesity.

This diet consists of four prime ingredients, mixed together in equal amounts.

I. Rice (Brown or White) - Cooked according to package directions. Brown rice is more nutritious than white rice, therefore it is recommended. Do not use Minute or Converted rice since they have the least nutritive value.

II. Beans - Canned or frozen (thawed, not cooked) kidney, pinto, lima, butter, navy, lentil, garbonzo or any other "seed type" bean is acceptable. Raw beans may be used, but cook these prior to mixing into the diet. Drain the liquid prior to mixing with the other ingredients. For smaller birds (cockatiel size and smaller), chop the beans into small chunks.

III. Mixed Vegetables - Use one portion of mixed vegetables with one portion of corn. Frozen vegetables which are thawed, but not cooked, are preferred.

IV. Avian Pellet - This portion provides the protein source. Well-balanced pelleted diets specifically formulated for pet birds have been marketed and make an excellent addition to this diet. For birds cockatiel size and smaller, crush the food into crumbles before using.

Once these four ingredients are mixed together, the diet is then packaged into individual Ziploc sandwich bags in daily feeding amounts and placed in the freezer. In this manner, up to a four week supply of food can be made at one time.

The diet should be provided in the following quantities. These suggested amounts may be more than the bird will be able to eat, however, this allows for initial experimentation by the bird until it gets used to the change.

Finch/Canary - 1 1/2 tsp / bird / day  
Parakeet/Lovebird - 1 Tblsp / bird / day  
Cockatiel - 1 1/2 Tblsp / bird / day

Conure - 3 Tblsp / bird / day

African Grey, Amazon, Cockatoo - 1/4 - 1/3 cup / bird / day

Dwarf Macaw & large Cockatoo - 1/3 - 2/3 cup / bird / day

Macaw - 1/2 - 1 cup / bird / day

Each day, a bag is removed from the freezer and thawed at room temperature, in a warm water bath, or in the microwave. An equal amount of parakeet seed is mixed in with the diet. This mixture can then be placed into the bird's food dish. The uneaten portion should be removed from the cage each evening, because this mixture may spoil if left out for extended periods of time. Over the next few weeks, the amount provided should be decreased to a portion which will be completely eaten by the bird during the day.

During the first few days, your pet may eat very little of the new diet. In fact, the bird may demand that his former seed diet be provided, but do not easily give in to these temper tantrums. Make sure, however, that he is eating enough of the new diet by monitoring the amount of dropping produced daily. If a bird is not eating enough to maintain himself, the size and number of droppings will be much less, and he may have to be supplemented with some of the former diet. If the pet is given his old food just because he prefers it over this diet, then the process of converting to a healthy diet may be delayed.

To facilitate an easier transition, place the mixture near a favorite sitting area or toy to encourage investigation and ingestion. Seasoning the diet with a small amount of the bird's favorite treats, thoroughly mixed into the diet, may also help with acceptance.

Changes in the bird's droppings are normal with any dietary change. The droppings appear lighter in color, larger and more moist with this diet. In some cases, if the change is too rapid or dramatic, diarrhea, excess fluid or vomiting may result, and we should be contacted for further instructions.

Be patient and persistent. Keep reminding yourself that this is for your pet's own good, even though he will try to convince you otherwise. Eventually, your pet will eat the full portion of the diet, and actually enjoy it. In the long run, it will help keep your pet bird alive and healthy for many years to come.

If you have any further questions or problems, do not hesitate to call. The only stupid questions are those which are never asked.

\*\*A special "Thank you" to Dr. Susan Brown whose client information sheets served as a basis for this handout.

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