

Nutrition 101: Birds

Congratulations on your new companion bird! Proper nutrition is one of the most important elements of your bird's care – and needs differ from species to species, and sometimes within varieties of the same species. Malnutrition can have a terrible impact on your bird's health, but a little education makes it easy to avoid.

What Should Your Bird Eat?

The most important element of bird nutrition is determining the main source of his diet. Whether your bird is a florivore (eating mostly seeds, fruits and berries); a frugivore (eating mostly fruits and flowers); an omnivore (which eats both plants and animals); or requires yet another type of diet, the best place to start is with a detailed conversation with a veterinarian who *specializes in birds*.

Now What?

One thing is for sure: birds cannot exist on seeds alone. Even a bird whose diet is seed-based requires other food items to ensure its nutritional needs are met. That's because commercial birdseed does not have the level of nutrition that's found in wild seeds, and because birds will pick and choose their favorite seeds to eat, resulting in an unbalanced diet. Your best bet is a combination diet of formulated food, vegetables, fruits and an occasional treat.

Birds can eat many of the same fruits and veggies that we do. Don't forget to wash everything thoroughly and remove any pits or apple seeds. Offer more vegetables than fruits, which are high in sugar and calories.

There are some foods to avoid. In addition to fruit pits and apple seeds, never give your bird any of the following items:

- Junk food like chips and candy
- Chocolate
- Mushrooms
- Avocado or guacamole
- Caffeine or alcohol
- Persimmons
- Table salt
- Onions

Feeding Time is Fun Time

In the wild, feeding involves foraging and activity. Companion birds don't have this opportunity for exercise and stimulation, so it is important to help them re-create the foraging experience by making feeding time interesting. Try hiding food in toys, weaving food into the bars of your bird's cage, or hanging treats from different places at each feeding.

Keep it Clean

It's very important to maintain good hygiene in your bird's living space. Wash food and water dishes in hot water daily, and never leave food out longer than 24 hours to avoid spoiling or contamination. If you use a water bottle, change the water every day and always check to make sure the bottle is in proper working order.

The Bottom Line

Your companion bird will provide you with years of friendship with just a little effort on your part. Make sure you know the best foods for your bird and he will stay healthy and strong for a lifetime.