



Conversion of a Parrot from a Seed Diet: One Method

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There are several methods for converting a parrot who eats a seed mix as the primary dietary staple to a better diet. As far as a “better diet” goes, veterinarians typically recommend switching the parrot from eating seed to eating pellets.

This can be a difficult thing to accomplish if you simply offer a choice between seed and pellets; the parrot will almost always choose to eat the seed and ignore the pellets. The pellets are not visually familiar and they have a lower fat content.

Therefore, many methods for conversion use at least a small element of food deprivation to encourage the parrot to try the pellets. A common method is to allow the parrot to eat his fill of seed mix for 30 minutes in the morning. This is then removed and he is left with pellets as his only food choice during the day. He then receives seed mix again for 20 minutes in the evening. The length of time he is allowed to eat seed at each session is then gradually decreased.

This method has disadvantages. It is often unpalatable for caregivers, who worry that their bird won’t eat the pellets during the day and will be hungry. The method tends to take longer to accomplish the end goal. Parrots do learn to eat pellets, but may still not be willing to consume other foods for variety. Lastly, this method takes careful monitoring to make sure that the parrot is getting enough to eat.

Using Chop Mix to Convert from Seed to Pellets

My favorite method for converting a parrot off of a seed mix uses a fresh food mix called Chop. You have been provided with my recipe for that mix, although this is certainly not engraved in stone. There are many variations on the Chop Mix theme.

This method has several advantages. The Chop offers a true foraging experience, which the birds really come to enjoy. Since the Chop always looks pretty much the same, you can get more variety into the bird since it does not stimulate neophobic responses. Using the Chop to convert parrots gets fairly fast success and results in a bird who eats a well-balanced, low-fat, low-carb diet, which is what we want.

The goal diet that I recommend and use for my own birds offers free-choice pellets and two supplemental meals each day, one first thing in the morning and the second in late afternoon or early evening. I choose the Lafeber Classic Nutriberry and Avicakes to offer in the evening. These are formulated foods, so offer balanced nutrition. They are readily accepted and enjoyed by the majority of birds.

Therefore, that is the diet I have provided instructions for below. You are free to decide for yourself whether to offer supplemental foods at all, and if so, what those will be. I suggest that you confer with your avian veterinarian on this matter.

Preparatory Steps:

- Purchase a good quality pellet. (Harrison's, Roudybush, Hagen, Zupreem Natural)
 - o Harrison's **High Potency** pellets make the conversion process go more quickly.
- Purchase the Lafeber Classic Nutriberries and Avicakes in sizes appropriate to your species of parrot.
- Prepare Chop Mix. (This is suitable for both large and small parrots.)
- Measure the amount of seed mix that your parrot actually eats in one day, using standard measuring cups, so you identify your starting point.
- Get into the habit of changing cage papers once a day.
 - o A valuable practice is to put papers **over** the cage grate (on the cage floor). This allows you to:
 - Monitor droppings and food consumption
 - Change papers more easily
 - ...and allows the parrot to go down and forage for what he dropped.

The Process:

First Weeks:

- Have the pellets available in a separate dish all of the time – do not mix them with any other foods. (Until they are accepted, there's no point in putting more than a few at a time in the dish.)
- Each morning, mix the quantity of seed that your parrot normally eats in one day into an equal quantity of Chop Mix and serve. (Be sure to completely mix the two.)
 - o Example: ¼ seed mix with ¼ cup of Chop Mix
 - o This can be left in the cage all day.
- Each evening, remove the Chop Mix/Seed dish and refill with either of these:
 - o Another serving of Chop and seed – or
 - o A small serving of Nutriberries and Avicakes (the latter should be broken up into pieces)
- **Monitor your parrot carefully to see what he is eating.**
 - o If he accepts the Nutriberries and Avicakes right away, as many parrots do, you can increase right away the quantity of these that you offer and will be able to decrease the seed more quickly during the coming weeks. If he doesn't, don't worry – just keep offering them.
 - o **Make sure that he is eating the seed out of the Chop Mix.**
 - If he won't forage through the Chop Mix for the seed, then give him a dish with just seed in it for 30 minutes in the morning and again for 20 minutes in the evening. You won't have to do this for long.

- Once you see that he has had his beak in the Chop/Seed mix, stop offering the dish with only seed.
- Do not progress to the next step until you see bits of the Chop Mix on the bottom of the cage.

Following Weeks - Decreasing the Seed:

- When you see pieces of the Chop Mix on the cage floor, begin to decrease the seed mix. Below is an example, using our original portions of ¼ cup seed mixed into ¼ cup of Chop.
 - Week One: ¼ cup seed (four tablespoons) in ¼ cup Chop.
 - Week Two: 3 tablespoons of seed in ¼ cup of Chop.
 - Week Three: 2 tablespoons of seed in ¼ cup of Chop.
 - Week Four: 1 tablespoon (three teaspoons) of seed in ¼ cup of Chop.
 - Week Five: 2 teaspoons of seed in ¼ cup of Chop.
 - Week Six: 1 teaspoon of seed in ¼ chop of Chop.
 - Week Seven and onward – ¼ cup of Chop in the morning with a few pieces of fruit on the side (no seed at all in the diet, except for training.)

The Result: Somewhere during this conversion process, your parrot will begin to eat the pellets. This is because, as you decrease the seed mix, he will begin to look for other sources for his dietary fat requirements. The end result is that you have a parrot who eats pellets, a fresh food mix with lots of variety, and the Lafeber Nutriberries and Avicakes. This method always works. I have never known it to fail if applied as instructed.

A Few Words:

The rate at which you decrease the seed can be slower or faster. As mentioned above, if your parrot accepts the Nutriberries and Avicakes sooner, you can decrease the seed more quickly. (These are both more nutritionally suitable than the seed mix.)

If it takes a long time for your parrot to accept the Lafeber foods and the Chop mix, then you might have to go more slowly.

Please weigh your parrot during this conversion process. It can be quite an easy process to teach a parrot to step voluntarily onto a scale with a low platform.

Just keep doing the right thing for long enough. **You will be successful.**

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