SLOW AND STEADY

Over the course of a week, your bird gradually transitions from his old food to a new pellet-based feeding plan.

Choose this plan if your bird is:

- A Conure or larger
- A foot feeder
- Over 3 years old
- A shy personality

SLOW AND STEADY STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

Day 1 - Remove the old food

In the evening, take your old food out of the cage. The goal is to take away food at night so that your bird is hungry in the morning and more apt to try new food. Make sure he has access to fresh, clean water; as some birds will drink more during the conversion process.

Tips:

- Conversion takes time and patience; the idea with this method is to allow your bird to gradually transition to a healthier, pellet-based diet over the course of a week.
- Most birds sleep at night and consume little food, so removing food from the cage at night will not harm your bird.
- This method may work better for birds that spend most of their time eating in their cages or that tend to have shyer personalities.
- This method also may work better for slightly larger birds (the size of a conure or larger) that typically use their feet to hold food while perching, rather than feeding off the ground (as many smaller birds do).
- Since older birds typically don’t need as many calories each day as young, growing or breeding birds, this slow and steady method that involves periods in which a bird may end up eating very little may be more appropriate for mature, fully grown, non-breeding birds.
Day 2 - Put the new food in the cage

First thing in the morning, put the new food in the cage. Leave the new food in the cage for the next 4 hours. Be sure to put the new food into the cup from which your bird normally eats each day.

Tips:

- Your bird may not initially recognize the new food in his cup as food; be patient, and try not to worry if he doesn’t eat the new food immediately after you put it in the cage. It may take a few hours to several days.

- Some birds may not touch the new food at all during this first exposure; don’t worry – healthy birds can go several hours without eating and be fine.

- If your bird does start eating the new pelleted food, enthusiastically praise him by saying something like, “Good bird!” and using his name. If he enjoys head scratches, scratch his head through the cage bars as you praise him for tasting the new food.

- Birds work for their owners’ attention, so if your bird sees that you give him attention and praise for eating the new food, he will seek out your attention and come to anticipate it by eating the new pellets.

- If your bird doesn’t show interest in the new food, moisten it with a small amount of warm fruit juice to entice your bird to try it; however, don’t leave moistened food in the cage for more than a couple of hours, or it can spoil with the growth of yeast and bacteria.

Day 2 – Check to see if your bird is eating the new food

If he is eating the new food, that’s great. Continue to praise him both verbally and physically when he is eating it. If your bird isn’t eating the new food by the afternoon of Day 2, don’t be concerned; it takes some birds several days to recognize the new food as food and to try it.

If you do have to offer your bird a small serving of his old food on the afternoon of Day 2, do not remove the cup of new pellets; simply offer his old food in another, different cup. Do not mix the old and new food.

Tips:

- Always keep old and new food separate, because birds will selectively eat familiar food when it is mixed with something new, and they will be less likely to try the new food if it is mixed with the old food.

- Offering a small serving of old food ensures that even a stubborn bird that is reluctant to try new food is still getting calories as he transitions slowly to pellets.
Day 2 – *Remove old food, replace with new food*

Before bedtime, remove any old food that remains in the cage. Put a portion of the new food in the cage overnight.

**Tips:**

- Once again, the goal of removing the old food overnight is to make the bird hungry so that he is more willing to try new food in the morning.

- Since your bird just ate a serving of old food the previous afternoon, he may not be hungry enough to eat the new food overnight, so don’t be alarmed if the new food still looks untouched the next morning.

Day 3 – *Observe the amount of new food eaten*

If your bird didn’t eat much overnight, he may be hungry enough by the morning of Day 3 to try the new food. If he is consuming the food, that’s great. If not, be patient and leave the new food in the cage again for 4-6 hours. The idea is to gradually extend the amount of time, from 4 hours to 6 hours, that your bird has access only to the new food to encourage him to try it.

**Tips:**

- If you see him taste the new food, once again, praise him verbally and physically by using his name and scratching his head to encourage him to try the new food.

- Healthy birds can go 4-6 hours without eating and be fine, so if your bird consumes little to nothing during this time, don’t be concerned.

Day 3 – *Put some new food in the cage overnight*

In the evening, if your bird is still not eating, place another serving of the old food in the cage. Remember not to give an excessive amount of the old food, just a small serving to ensure that your bird gets some calories that day. Remove this food before bedtime. Put a portion of the new food in the cage overnight.

**Tips:**

- Be sure to remove any uneaten portion of old food left in the cage on the evening of Day 3 so that if your bird gets hungry overnight, the only food there for him to try is the new food.

- Remember never to mix old food with new food, as birds will almost always select the old food to eat and ignore the new food.
Day 4 – Day 7 – Gradually extend the length of time with new food

Continue to gradually extend the length of time the new food is in the cage over the next few days. Only feed the old food in the evening if your bird is not consuming the new food. The goal is to begin to completely eliminate the old food and convert over to the new food. Cut back the amount of old food you offer each day until you don’t have to offer any, since the bird is now consuming an adequate number of pellets.

Ideally, to ensure that your bird is consuming an adequate number of pellets each day, get a scale that weighs in grams, and weigh your bird each morning, before he eats; track your bird’s weight over the course of the conversion.

Tips:

- Once again, the idea is to gradually extend the amount of time each day, by a few hours at a time, over a period of a few days, that your bird has access to only the new food to encourage him to try it.

- Healthy birds can go a day eating little to nothing, and they will be fine; eventually, they will get hungry enough to try the new food.

- Try not to give into your concern that your bird isn’t eating over the course of a day by offering him his old food; if you do end up offering it to him, give him only a very small amount of old food so that he doesn’t fill up on it and not be hungry enough to try the new food.

- If he does try the new food, praise him as he does both verbally by using his name and physically with head scratches to encourage him to continue to eat the new food.

- Birds converting to pellets, especially if they have been eating high-fat seeds and nuts, initially may lose a few grams – sometimes up to 10% of their body weight. This is because pellets generally have less fat than seeds and nuts.

- If your bird loses more than 10% of his body weight when converting to pellets, or he seems weak or lethargic, contact your avian veterinarian immediately.

- Another way to be sure your bird is eating enough when he converts to pellets is to count his droppings each day by placing a sheet of paper towel on the cage bottom where the droppings fall. The paper towel makes it easier to see each dropping.

- Your bird should produce several droppings a day (at least one every few hours, depending on what he is eating) as he transitions to pellets; if you are not seeing this many droppings, especially if the bird is thin to begin with, contact your avian veterinarian to see whether he or she wants you to extend the length of the conversion process as your pet gradually makes the transition.

- The consistency of the droppings may change once your bird is consuming mostly pellets; they may be softer and moister. There is no cause for concern if you see these changes, as long as the bird is eating and active. If you see changes in droppings’ consistency, and your bird appears weak or lethargic, contact your avian veterinarian.

- Don’t be surprised if you offer a multi-colored pellet, and your bird selects out certain colors he prefers while leaving over colors he isn’t interested in; this is a common behavior and not a cause for concern.

- Birds selecting out a certain color of pellets may have droppings of that color; once again, this is not a cause for concern, as long as they are eating.