BIRDIE'S CHOICE

Choose three types of pellets and let your bird select his new pellet-based feeding plan quickly and without weeks of transitioning foods.

Choose this plan if your bird is:

Cockatiel or smaller
Under 3 years old

Ground feeding species
Finger tame

BIRDIE'S CHOICE STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

Choose up to three types of pelleted food

Choose up to three different types of pelleted food for your bird. The goal is to allow your bird to choose among three different pellet types he might like best and transition to that type without having to use other transitioning foods. Always make sure he has access to fresh, clean water; some birds will drink more during the conversion process.

Tips:

- Try pellets of varying colors and shapes to allow your bird to select what he likes best.
- Include pellets of different sizes, as some birds prefer a size up or down from what is generally recommended for their breed.
**Place your bird on a safe table top**

Place your bird on a safe table top that allows him to move around. When placing your bird on a table top, choose a location your bird is familiar with so that he is comfortable.

Place your bird in the center of the table, rather than at the edge, so he doesn’t fall off. Allow him a few minutes to explore and to acclimate before you introduce any pellets. Be sure to supervise your bird at all times on the table so that he doesn’t fall.

**Tips:**

- This method works best for smaller species, such as budgies and cockatiels, that typically feed off the ground in the wild.
- This method also may work better for finger-tamed birds that are comfortable being on or near human hands.

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**Create small piles of each pelleted food**

Create a few small piles of pellets of each type of food on the table. Place the piles of pellets a few inches apart, so that they are clearly separated. Limit the number of pellets in each pile so that your bird can see the distinct pellet types in each of the piles.

Do not put the piles too close to the edge, so that your bird is in danger of falling if he goes over to a pile to investigate it.

If your bird starts heading towards a pile, encourage him by saying something enthusiastically like, “Good bird!” and using his name. If he actually reaches out to touch, pick up, or taste a pellet, increase your verbal praise.

**Tips:**

- Birds often have specific preferences for certain pellet types, which is why you should include distinct pellet types in each pile.
- Be patient – it may take your bird a few minutes to feel comfortable navigating the table top and moving over to a particular pile.
- Follow your bird’s cues; let him pick the pile he wants to explore first.

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**Tap in front of the piles**

Use your fingernail to tap the table top so that it makes a clicking sound like a beak tapping on the table; this clicking sound mimics what a bird’s beak would sound like as the bird reached down to check out a pellet.

If your bird is investigating a particular pile of pellets on his own, wait to see what he does before you start tapping. If he approaches a pile but stops short of touching the pellets, then start tapping. A couple of taps may be all it takes for him to explore further on his own by picking up a pellet with his foot or beak.

If he does not approach the piles, tap in front of the piles to get his attention. Spread the piles out a little if necessary. If he doesn’t investigate a particular pile of pellets further after the first couple of taps, try again in a minute or two; if he still doesn’t respond, try tapping at a different pile.
**Praise your bird as they eat the food**

Praise your bird and scratch their head as they start to eat the food. Eventually, your bird will come to anticipate touching and eating the pellets with receiving praise from you.

If your bird moves from just touching the pellets to actually tasting them, ramp up the verbal and physical praise, so that he really feels rewarded for tasting the pellets. If your bird doesn’t like to be touched, stick to verbal praise, and skip the head scratches.

**Tips:**

- Remember, birds generally work to gain your approval; praising your bird verbally by using his name and physically by scratching his head (if he enjoys head scratches) when he interacts with a particular brand of pellet positively reinforces his interaction with that type of pellet.

- Be sure to say the same phrase, such as “Good bird!” and use his name, over and over, as he interacts with the pellets so that he learns to associate touching the pellets with receiving praise.

**Place your bird on bird safe mirror**

You can also place a bird safe mirror flat on the table to stimulate your bird’s interest as he sees another bird eating the food. Place the mirror with a few pellets on it on the table top next to your bird, and wait to see how he responds. If he isn’t interested, move him on top of the mirror, and try tapping. If he seems uninterested or afraid of the mirror, don’t push it; take the mirror away, and go back to tapping on the table top and praising him for contact with the pellets.

**Tips:**

- Birds don’t recognize their own reflections; when they look in the mirror, they see another bird.

- Some birds are intrigued by the “bird in the mirror,” while others may be afraid; see how your bird responds, and use the mirror if he seems interested.
**Place selected food in the cage**

As soon as your bird expresses an interest in a particular type of pellet, fill up a cup with these pellets, and allow your bird to graze from it all day. Continue to praise your bird verbally and physically, with head scratches if he likes, whenever you see him interacting with the pellets in the cup.

**Tips:**

- While some birds show interest in pellets during their first table top exposure, it may take others a few table top sessions to try them out.
- Be patient; try a tabletop session no more than once a day over a few days.
- Birds may be interested on some days and not on others; take cues from your bird, and go with the flow.
- Most small birds will show interest in eating pellets within a week of daily sessions.
- Make the pellets he prefers available all the time, and limit offering other types of food initially until you see him regularly eating the pellets.
- Dry pellets can remain in the cage day and night; refresh the bowl of pellets daily or any time the pellets get wet or spoiled.
- Many birds love to dunk their pellets in water as they eat them.
- 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.

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**Monitor your bird’s food intake**

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

**Tips:**

- 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 converts 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 add back in a small amount of the bird’s old food as your pet 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.