

Synthetic Bird Feeds: Do They Promote Health or Disease?

by Alicia McWatters, Ph.D.
Edgewood, NM

An apple is an apple is an apple, but is a nutrient, a nutrient a nutrient???

Today, a bird owner can go to any bird or pet shop in town and purchase a dry convenience diet out of a bag or canister. It is *that* easy. The majority of bird owners feed these diets to their birds either as a portion of the diet or as a total diet on a daily basis. The sad part of this is that bird owners are taught to believe that this is the proper diet to feed their birds and that these diets are actually superior to a diet made up of natural whole foods. Gasp!

Why is it that nutritionists and medical doctors are currently recommending that humans include more fruits (2-4 servings) and vegetables (3-5 servings) in their daily diet to preserve health and prevent disease, yet most veterinarians are telling their bird-owning clients to feed more pellets to do the same?

Feeding pellets that contain *all* of the essential nutrients will provide your bird with "everything" it needs to maintain health. It sounds like a good idea in theory. After all, it *is* "complete nutrition" in a bag. Right? What a cool concept. Each and every bite your bird consumes will contain all the nutrients it needs, except the parts that crumble to the floor. Oops!

Think about it carefully. Can feeding your birds with this "complete nutrition" *really* fulfill all of your birds' needs? I'm sure those of you who hate to cook or to prepare meals hope with all your might that it is true.

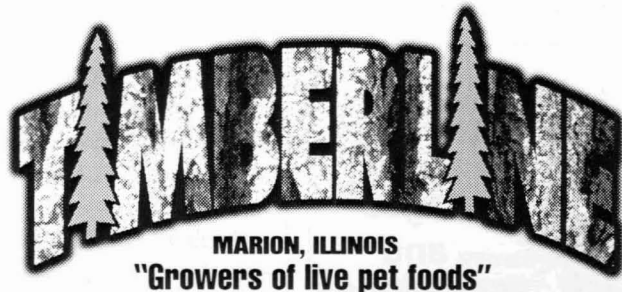
Well, two large studies performed by the National Cancer Institute designed to prove the worth of beta carotene supplements have shown that isolated nutrients do not always control disease or offer any health benefits (*Time*, "Medicine," January 29,

1996). In fact, they were shown in some cases to make a condition such

as cancer or heart disease worse, not better.

Another study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (Spring 1994) researchers concluded that synthetic vitamin E and beta carotene did not improve the health of those who experienced a stroke, lung cancer and other diseases.

Clearly, taking a simple isolated chemical supplement is *not* the same as eating a vegetable and a variety of



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other fresh whole foods. Scientists know that there are other natural ingredients that work with vitamins to promote health, such as is the case with vitamin C and bioflavonoids. They work synergistically for the optimum health results, not only to prevent disease, but also to cure it.

Many of you will find this hard to believe, but ascorbic acid is not vitamin C, although to simplify things the literature does refer to it as such. Instead, vitamin C in its complexity is mainly composed of tyrosinase (which supplies organic copper), bioflavonoids, and ascorbic acid (the antioxidant portion that protects the other two from

spoilage). In fact, tyrosinase is the active ingredient of vitamin C. The tyrosinase in vitamin C converts tyrosine to thyroid and adrenal hormones.

In an effort to make products quickly, inexpensively, and in great quantities, scientists continue to isolate what they believe is the active ingredient of nutritional complexes, copy them in mirror images of crystalline pure chemicals and mass-produce them as "foods" or nutritional supplements. An overdose of vitamin C or any isolated nutrient for that matter can weaken your system because without its synergistic parts to work efficiently and effectively it must drain the body's own supplies.

If your bird's body were mildly deficient in copper, too much ascorbic acid could create a copper deficiency, which can negatively affect the immune system. If you will take a closer look at synthetic nutrients, you will see their failure to aid in optimum health and, in some disease states, see a worsening of symptoms.

So offering your birds a pelleted diet is similar to taking a bottle of synthetic multi-vitamins and grinding the pills up in a blender and pouring it into your birds' food bowl each day. How long would you suspect that your bird would remain healthy if you did this every day?

Well, I suspect each bird would react differently depending on its individual biochemistry and constitution, but I certainly wouldn't expect my birds to live nearly as long and would also suspect that they may be getting more than enough of some nutrients and not enough of others. Consequently, disease, infection and perhaps malnutrition would not be too far away.

Rats and other laboratory animals are fed a diet similar to a pelleted diet, but they are not expected to live a long enough life for it to matter much what they eat. I often refer to a pelleted diet as a fabricated diet, a lab diet, or a processed diet. These terms do not sound appetizing to me. How about you?

In the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* (March 21, 1940) it was reported that "synthetic vitamins should be used with caution in order to prevent the development of defi-

ciencies more serious than the deficiency we set out to control."

The truth of the matter is that the scientific community has long known that whole food complexes are superior to artificial nutrients and that synthetic nutrients act more like drugs, not real vitamins. Common sense tells us this, but the argument still remains between those who refuse to believe or understand that real foods will always be superior to a synthetic chemical diet.

The healing power of fresh whole foods cannot be denied. Natural nutrient complexes are found only in raw whole foods. Isolated nutrients are patently pharmaceuticals, not phytochemicals. Fractionated nutrients are not natural and therefore, cannot provide the same health benefits as whole food complexes.

Despite what feed manufacturers tell you, synthetic nutrients are not exactly the same as real or natural food source vitamins. In fact, they are chemicals of one isolated portion of a vitamin fraction, and even that fraction is not the same as is found in nature. It is instead a mirror image which is identical, but in reverse.

So the next time someone tells you that synthetic nutrients are exactly the same as real vitamins from food sources (exact mirror images), you can tell them that it is virtually impossible for mirror-image synthetic nutrients to combine with other nutrients in order to be properly utilized by the body. In order for this to happen the diet must contain the appropriate nutritional components.

I strongly suggest that you read *all* labels of *all* food products *before* you serve them to your birds. Chances are very good that you won't want your birds to eat them after all and you will be eagerly on your way to the nearest supermarket to buy your birds an abundance of natural whole foods. ❖

Alicia McWatters resides in New Mexico with her family and two pet birds: Congo Grey "Tiffany" and African Red-bellied Parrot "Lucy." She was a breeder of Greys and Pionus for a number of years and currently works as a holistic avian nutrition and health consultant. She can be reached for a private consultation at (505) 281-5168.




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