



Vitamin A – The Often Missing Nutrient

Parrots, relative to humans, have very high nutritional need for Vitamin A estimated at 2000-4000 I.U./Kg. Therefore, a **medium sized parrot** (Amazon, Grey, etc.) **requires 800-2000 I.U. Vitamin A per day**; the average adult human 5000 I.U. per day. Doesn't seem much different until you consider that an adult person is roughly 100 - 150 TIMES larger than a parrot! In addition, companion parrots are very inactive compared to their wild cousins so they don't eat as many calories. It's tough to get this much Vitamin A in only 100-150 calories/day so teaching your bird to accept a pelleted diet is vitally important. In addition, choosing nutrient rich vegetables are key to good health for your parrot. You'll notice that the vegetables with highest Vitamin A content are those with vivid orange, red, deep yellow flesh, or dark green for the edible leafy vegetables.

Vitamin A is critical to a healthy immune system, feather growth and repair, vision, strong bones, foot health and liver function. Without sufficient Vitamin A, your bird will be more prone to sinus or respiratory infections, bumble foot and foot sores, liver disease and other illnesses. Vitamin A deficiency remains incredibly common; UC Davis Veterinary College has reported that HALF of all parrots undergoing necropsy showed physical signs of Vitamin A deficiency.

500-1000 I.U. per tablespoon:

Yams (orange flesh)
Pumpkin
Carrots

250-500 I.U. per tablespoon:

Butternut Squash
Spinach
Kale, Mustard Greens, Collard Greens
Red Bell Pepper
Winter Squash (e.g. Hubbard, Acorn)

100-250 I.U. per tablespoon:

Beet Greens, Turnip Greens, Swiss Chard, Mustard Greens
Dried Chili Peppers
Water Cress, Parsley

Veggies with less than 20 I.U. per tablespoon (these aren't "bad" veggies, just don't rely on them to meet your bird's Vitamin A needs) *Excellent sources of many other important nutrients.

Green Beans
Brussels Sprouts*
Green Bell Pepper
Broccoli*

Celery
Corn
Zucchini
Cabbage*

Cucumber

Organic Red Palm Oil (*not* palm kernel oil) provides 500 I.U. Vitamin A per ¼ teaspoon. This is easily added to items such as birdie muffins, mashed vegetables, cooked oatmeal, etc.

The only fresh fruit choices providing more than 50 I.U. per tablespoon are canteloupe and apricot. Even so a 1 tablespoon portion provides 6% or less of your bird's Vitamin A daily requirement.

Commonly eaten fresh fruit such as apple, grape, and banana provide less than FIVE I.U. per tablespoon! Unbelievably, these choices are even lower in Vitamin A than seed. Again, they are not "bad" fruit; they just don't pack the nutritional punch of more richly colored vegetables or fruits.

A comment about supplements – do NOT provide vitamin supplements to your bird unless prescribed by an Avian Veterinarian. The majority of supplements contain preformed Vitamin A (not beta-carotene) which can quickly lead to toxicity if dosed incorrectly.

Parrot Education & Adoption Center is a 501(c)3 non-profit volunteer organization dedicated to educating current and future parrot owners regarding the best possible care for companion parrots. We also accept unwanted parrots into our foster program and adopt them to qualified applicants. Our website is www.peac.org.