

## How Much Cereal Is Too Much For Pet Birds?

**Find out how big or small of an amount of cereal to feed your bird.**

*By Susan Chamberlain*

How much cereal can we feed our birds, specifically and what about its zinc levels? According to avian veterinarian Elisabeth Simone-Freilicher, a research study by a well-known psittacine pellet manufacturer reported that about 40 milligram (mg) of zinc per kilogram (kg) of food seems to be needed to produce optimal growth in cockatiels.

“Poultry research shows optimum growth in chickens occurs at between 40 to 80 mg/kg of feed. At zinc levels of 200 mg/kg of feed, chickens show an increased amount of zinc stored in the thyroid. Let’s consider that an early sign of toxicity.”

### The Scoop On Feeding Cereal To Pet Birds

Human cereal can be a healthy snack to feed our pet birds if given in moderation. [Read Now>>](#)

According to its label, Honey-Nut Cheerios contains 25 percent of the U.S. Recommended Daily Allowance (for humans) of zinc, which is 11 mg. Regular Cheerios – which has a slightly larger serving, probably due to fewer calories from sugar – contains 25 percent of the U.S. RDA of zinc for humans.

“Honey-Nut Cheerios contains 2.75 mg of zinc per 28 gram (g) serving, or 98 mg/kg of feed. Regular Cheerios contain 2.75 mg of zinc per 30 g serving, or about 92 mg/kg of feed. If fed as the only diet, this might be safe for chickens, but it may be a bit high for cockatiels, and probably for other psittacine birds,” said Freilicher, who pointed out that the important question is, “How much is a pet bird likely to eat?”

“Approximately 12 regular Cheerios weigh approximately 1 gram. If a pet bird eats 12 Cheerios, it will receive 0.098 mg of zinc. This exceeds the amount a cockatiel should have during the day, but it would probably be fine for a macaw. So a cockatiel should probably receive only 1 to 2 Cheerios, and only once in a while.

“Vitamin D3 can be toxic to macaws when fed in high doses. Up to 12 Cheerios probably are fine, as a full serving (30 g) contains only 10 percent of the US RDA of vitamin D. But I am more concerned about cereals with higher amounts of vitamin D, such as Total; these could potentially be more toxic. However, cereals don’t specify if the vitamin D is D2 or D3 – they don’t have to, because we utilize either one. Birds can only use D3, they don’t convert D2 very well. So without knowing this, it’s hard to tell whether the level of vitamin D3 in cereals would be toxic.”

“In moderation, cereals are probably OK as a treat if chosen carefully. This means low-sugar, low-fiber, and not too highly-fortified cereals, offered in very small amounts, once in a while. The real problems come when too much is eaten, or the owner doesn’t try very hard to get their bird onto pellets because ‘he eats table foods’ such as cereal,” Freilicher concluded.