

BIRD TALK Editor's Note: Can't Weight

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The BIRD TALK team ventured out on Friday the 13th of April to attend the America's Family Pet Expo in Costa Mesa, CA. (Left to right: assistant editor Connie Cho, BirdChannel.com assistant web editor Crystal Apilado, editor Melissa Kauffman, managing editor Laura Doering and Laura's "fledgling," Finlay.

About two months ago, a good friend and fellow editor (on a sister publication) told me about his frustrations with losing weight. I sympathized. I had put on — what I thought was — 5 pounds myself recently. Even though I changed my eating habits (no more fried food, wheat bread not white bread) and exercised at the gym three times a week, I was unable to lose the weight. So I said I would join Weight Watchers with him.

I quickly discovered that the 5 pounds I had gained had gone to 10 pounds somewhere along the way. And I also discovered that what I had been eating — in my mind, healthy and of small portions — was too much and too fatty. It was a shock to me both emotionally and mentally. When they say eat small portions, they really mean eat a tiny portion. When they say eat a low-calorie, low-fat diet, they mean "Don't eat anything you like to eat." It was shocking to me how far off my perceptions of food were with reality. No wonder I couldn't lose the weight.

Now, as pet bird owners, we all extend our own eating habits to our pet birds. Our habit becomes their habit because they depend on us to dole out the food. Even though I never ate big portions, I did eat medium portions, which were still bigger than an actual serving. So I was feeding me and my birds what I thought were healthy portion sizes.

Next time you grab something to eat, look where it says serving size, then get out a measuring cup and measure it out. If you can actually eat one serving and stop, I applaud you. Frankly, I can finish one serving of cereal in about four or five bites. Most people glance at the calories on a package and don't notice that the small box that seems to be one serving is actually four servings, and if you eat the entire box, which you do, then you need to multiply the calories by four. Reality bites when you've got the munchies.

So when you feed your bird, how much food do you give it? Do you use measuring spoons and cups, or do you go by your own mental estimate?

Portion control is especially important because most of us don't have a clear idea of what a true serving is. We had news editor Rose Gordon look at the situation, and she provided a list of species-specific portions. You can find it at Birdchannel.com. Just go to the home page, click on the tab called exclusives and click on the article, "To Each Their Own Bird Diet." She also did a follow-up article where she asked bird food companies for their recommendations on how much to feed birds in the article, "What's Their Take On Avian Diets?"

So, to date I've lost the 10 pounds, but I haven't had a piece of chocolate cake in two months, and I do love the chocolate cake. I am now both envious and horrified by what everyone around me eats, and I am much more careful about how much I give my tiels and my guinea pigs. We won't win any modeling contracts any time soon, but we will live longer, healthier lives. And as for that chocolate cake, I will have one big slice some day soon — I can't wait! — Melissa L Kauffman