

CARING FOR A SICK OR INJURED CHICKEN

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If you detect an injury or a marked change in behavior, activity or appetite or that lasts more than one or two days, isolate your sick or injured bird from the other birds. Consult the chart "PHYSICAL EXAM FOR CHICKENS" for a head to toe inspection. Chickens are remarkably resilient and can recover amazingly well from significant illness and trauma. Warmth, easy access to food and water and quiet are the most important things to provide to a sick or injured bird.

Do daily care chores for healthy birds first to prevent spread of infectious conditions.

At first sign of injury or illness, confine him/her in a hospital kennel. Medium sized dog crate is perfect for most chickens. Confinement will calm the bird and allow him/her to focus on recovery. It also allows you to see how much food and water is being consumed and evaluate droppings. It also helps to minimize stress to an injury and also prevent spreading illness.



Hospital Kennel

Provide clean bedding like soft old towels and hook-on water and food dish that won't soil or spill. Change bedding and water at least twice a day. Pick up droppings with a tissue throughout the day if possible. Place heating pad under bedding or a red lamp overhead. Optimum temperature for a sick bird is 80-85 degrees.

Keep the carrier indoors and near you. This allows you to monitor progress and keeps them company. Birds housed alone become quickly depressed. The carrier is easily carried

from room to room.

If the bird has a respiratory problem, a humidifier can make them more comfortable and help keep them hydrated. Sustained open beak breathing is serious and veterinary attention should be sought immediately.



Once the bird is showing signs of recovery, he/she can be transferred to a child's play pen. The soft padding is excellent to prevent bumble foot and softens impact on injuries. It is very easy to maintain and can be covered if the bird wants to fly. Graco makes a collapsible 40 x 28 x 30H play pen which is very portable and compact for storage. We got one in perfect condition for \$10 on craig's list <http://minneapolis.craigslist.org/> . Don't pay more than \$30.

If the bird is not drinking sufficient amounts on their own (at least 1/2 cup water per day for a 4 lb. bird) they will become dehydrated. A dehydrated bird will feel worse, it will complicate their condition and inhibit the movement of food through the digestive tract due to lack of lubrication and tissue elasticity. Test for dehydration by slightly pinching loose skin or wattle. If the skin holds the shape where you pinched instead of immediately springing back, that is an indication of dehydration. Offer electrolytes instead of plain water. Electrolytes affect and regulate the hydration of the body, blood pH, and are critical for nerve and muscle function. Readily available electrolyte solutions include vitamin enriched Vi-tal which can be purchased at FleetFarm in the livestock medication aisle. Mix 1/4 tsp. per gallon water and store the solution in the fridge. Another option is Gatorade diluted 50/50 with water. A third option is Pedialyte. Gatorade and Pedialyte are available in supermarkets.

Towel restraint is helpful for giving meds, fluids, hand feeding and wound care. Frequent holding and physical affection and play with your healthy birds makes for less stressful handling when they are sick. Wrap bird "burrito style" and hold securely upright in lap.

Electrolytes can be given in the water dish or by droplets dripped on top of the beak. Reflex will cause them to catch the droplets with their tongue. Some will even drink the droplets from the tip of the syringe. This is time consuming but is the safest way to prevent getting fluid down the airway which can be fatal. Take care not to drip it into the nares (nostrils).



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Offer favorite foods. Stirring with a chopstick is very stimulating for their appetite. Nutritional paste on food, in water, or squeezed out of a syringe (so it looks like a wiggling worm) is usually irresistible and provides concentrated nutrition and calories. Complete nutrition pellets like Roudybush Maintenance Crumbles or Harrison's High Protein crumbles pack balanced nutrition needed for recovery.

Hand feeding is sometimes necessary if they will not eat on their own. Mix a paste of handfeeding powder like Nupreen Hand Feeding Formula with an electrolyte solution. Hand feeding with a gavage or syringe should not be attempted without skilled instruction. Getting food or water into the airway (aspiration) can cause serious harm. A safe technique is to gently pry open the beak about 1/2" and wipe a fingerfull of the paste into the corner of the upper/lower beak. Watch to see that they have swallowed before repeating. One to two tablespoons of paste three times a day is a good amount to aim for. Another option is to dip small pieces of whole wheat bread in electrolytes, roll it in hand feeding formula and place in beak. They may readily accept if from the hand as well.

Offer fresh foods high in nutrition and water content like cucumbers, Romaine, grapes, melon, oranges, etc. Hard boiled eggs mashed shell and all are extremely nutritious and delicious to birds. Cooked brown rice is good too.

Monitor the crop by gently palpating (the food sack on the right side of their upper chest) to insure that it is eventually emptying its contents into the digestive tract, normally about 2-3 hours after eating. When full, you should be able to move the contents easily with gentle

pressure. If it feels more like a hard tennis ball, that is an indication of dehydration and crop impaction or crop stasis. Give fluids and massage crop. If no improvement in 24 hours, see a vet.

Minor superficial wounds can be cleaned with sterile gauze and clean water, hydrogen peroxide or very dilute Novalsan (an all purpose disinfectant available at FleetFarm) followed by Neosporin antibiotic cream. Keep out of eyes. If wounds on legs or feet require bandaging, use nonstick bandages, tape and cover loosely with vet wrap where appropriate. Chickens generally tolerate bandages very well. Deep lacerations to muscle or bone should be seen by a vet.

Wash hands thoroughly and often lathering with plenty of soap for 20 to 30 seconds (about the time it takes to sing the "alphabet song" three times at a fast tempo), rinsing, and then repeating for another 20 to 30 seconds. Wash between fingers and under the nails, and to soap into the creases around knuckles.

Keep a journal of daily observations to share with your vet. A vet visit will include routine diagnostic procedures like a physical exam, and may include a radiograph, a blood draw for a complete blood count (cbc) to look for infection, a blood chemistry profile to evaluate the presence of infection and body functions and a fecal check to detect parasites.

Also, see the following links:

<http://parrothouse.com/hlthcare.html#Emergency%20Sick%20Bird%20Care>

VET CLINICS FOR CHICKEN CARE MINNEAPOLIS / ST. PAUL / WESTERN WISCONSIN VICINITY

<http://www.brittonclouse.com/chickenrunrescue/#clinics>

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