



Feather pecking is a very common problem with hens kept in any type of enclosure (however large). It is not aggression related.



In a natural environment hens will spend all day foraging for food and scratching through the soil. If they get bored they can start feather pulling which becomes a habit, they will usually swallow the feathers.

It is usually easy to spot the culprit as she will have a full set of feathers.

Feathers can be either pulled completely out or snapped off as on the image on the left (she was originally a brown hen). More common is the in the images above where they tend to start pecking under the vent or on the saddle area.

POSSIBLE CAUSES	WHY?	TREATMENTS TO TRY
Boredom or change of routine	<p>Any stress or boredom can trigger feather pecking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Run too Small• Not enough stimulation or things to do.• Change to routine or space.• New hens being introduced.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give your hens more space• If you have a moveable run, move it daily.• Put a thick base in the run such as woodchips, this will give them something to scratch in. If the area is dry throw feed into the woodchips to keep them busy.• Hang up treat blocks, lettuces, cabbages etc in a net or fat ball feeder. Hang just above head height so they have to work for their food.• Try feeding dry layers mash instead of pellets - it will take them longer to eat.
Moulting or Injury	<p>When the hens see new quills coming through the skin it is very tempting to pull them out which can then develop into a habit.</p> <p>Any injury where blood is drawn can encourage the hens to start pecking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider fitting a poultry saddle if it will cover the damaged area. Leave on until the feathers have regrown.• Spray any damaged skin with purple wound spray to disguise it.
Lack of protein in the diet	<p>If 90% of your hens diet is a good quality layers pellets or mash, this is very unlikely to be the cause.</p>	<p>Try increasing the protein levels very slightly. Ensure their staple diet is still layers ration but add some high protein treats or a proportion of chick ration.</p> <p>Live mealworms are a very popular source of protein!</p>
Established Habit	<p>If allowed to go unchecked, the habit can spread to the whole flock as they copy and learn the habit off each other.</p>	<p>If the above tips haven't worked:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Try an anti peck spray. Spray over the hens at night when they are roosting to make it easier.2. If one particular hen is pecking isolate her for a few weeks.3. Fit a Bumpa Bit or 'C' shaped bit in the beak. This will stop the ends of the beak meeting & the hen getting a grip on the feathers. Careful fitting is required to prevent pain to the hen and deep feeders and drinkers are essential. Leave on for a couple of months before removing.