CHICKEN HEALTH CONCERNS

If you are concerned about your hens health please have the answers to the questionnaire below before telephoning or emailing us for advice - whilst we are very experienced with chickens we can't help without any specific symptoms. If you are taking your hen to the vets it will also be very helpful for them to have the answers to the questions.

Signs of a sick chicken

* Isolating herself from the flock or being chased away from the flock.
* Standing hunched up with her head pulled into her body looking 'puffed up' or with a 'penguin' stance.
* Not interested in food or water.
* Shrunken, pale or discoloured comb and wattles.
* Messy vent area.

1. Isolate the hen in a warm place (in cold weather) as she will be unable to regulate her body temperature if she is unwell - a dog crate with a blanket over it, or a large card box with air vents is ideal. Provide food and water. Line with newspaper.
2. Observe her for 24 hours and work through the questionnaire below.
3. See if any of the symptoms on the 'Symptom Checker' form fit.

CHICKEN HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE	
BODY PART TO CHECK	**CHECKLIST**
Head	Is there any eye damage/are pupils equal and reacting to light? Are there swellings around the eye? What colour are her comb and wattles? Is there any discharge from nostrils? Does the breath have any smell? Does she have a discharge from her ears?
Breathing	Is there any rattly breathing? Is she sneezing/coughing?
Crop	In the morning (before she has had access to food or water), feel the crop at the base of her neck for hard or soft lumps.
Body	Check her whole body for signs of injury/bruising/bite marks. Feel her keel bone - does it feel sharp/is she thin/overweight? It is essential to feel the keel bone, she may be heavy yet emaciated. Check one of your other hens for comparison. Feel the area below her vent/between her legs - is it swollen/are there any lumps in her body cavity? Her posture - Is she huddled up/is her tail in a normal position?
Vent	Are there droppings stuck around the vent? Are there any signs of broken egg coming from the vent? Is there any bleeding/damage to the vent? Does she appear to be straining or have her tail down? Does she have body lice or a greasy looking area at the base of the feathers around the vent?
Legs and feet	Are the scales on her legs lying flat and smooth? Are her claws overgrown? If he's a cockerel, are the spurs short? Does she have any signs of injury/bruising/swellings/hot areas? Are there any splinters or swellings in her foot pad?
General	Has she been wormed recently? How old is she? Hybrid chickens have a short lifespan. Has she had constant access to dry, clean, layers feed that is in date? Has she only been drinking clean water? Could she have access to poisonous plants/poison? Has she overheated or got chilled? Have the other hens been bullying her (this is subtle, they will not allow her to eat or drink enough and she may feel very thin - they will usually eat well in your presence when its safe). Have you had rats in/around the hens area? Are wild birds able to gain access to their food/water? Has she laid normal eggs recently? What are her droppings like - watery/green etc. Is the hen house clear of droppings and red mite?

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SYMPTOM CHECKER

SYMPTOM	THINGS TO CONSIDER
Pale Comb Purple Comb Floppy, shrunken comb	Red mite or Northern Fowl Mite, worm infestation. Heart/circulation problems. Dehydration. Moulting and general illness can also cause shrunken, pale combs.
Swelling around the eyes or under one eye.	Sinus infection or respiratory infection.
Rattly breathing, sneezing/cough type action, nasal discharge.	Ammonia damage - Inhaling ammonia from dirty bedding can damage respiratory tract and cause rattly breathing with mucous discharge/rattly breathing - common. Respiratory infection - may require antibiotics to prevent secondary infections occurring, commonly carried by wild birds. Fungal damage to the respiratory system caused by aspergillus fungus, commonly found in bark.
Bare patches with feathers missing.	Mechanical damage (putting head through wire/rubbing on feeder etc.) Feather pecking by flock mates - leaves smooth bare skin - common on saddle area or below the vent. Moulting - New feathers can be seen coming through the skin. Feather depluming mite - Very rare. Broodiness - Hens will remove their chest feathers to incubate the eggs. Cockerel damage - Feathers missing on saddle area.
Bulge at bottom of neck.	Sour crop - watery bag. Impacted crop - very hard lump. (Check the crop early in the morning before they have had access to food and water as it will contain food later in the day).
Weakness/unable to stand.	Injury - Feel legs and hips for signs of broken bones or hot areas indicating injury. Bumblefoot on sole of foot. Scaly leg mite Amorous cockerel causing injury. Lack of food or water causing weakness. Emaciated/thin ill hen weak from lack of food or water or being low in the pecking order - common when introducing new hens. Mareks disease - can only be confirmed by post mortem laboratory tests (All our birds are vaccinated for Mareks) Poisoning - plants, slug pellets, some garden fertilisers, rat poison etc. Blindness causing difficulty finding food. Egg peritonitis Botulism - caused by mouldy food or ingesting rotting flesh (dead mice are a favourite!) or green water. Out of date food causing vitamin deficiency. Heavy worm burden Stuck egg.
Heavy hen (possibly with large abdomen but actually emaciated)	Egg peritonitis Overweight - Feed only layers ration - torpedo shaped eggs are an indicator of a fat hen. Tumour in body cavity.
Wing hanging down	Injury/broken bone. Strap with vet wrap. Mareks disease - Can only be confirmed by post mortem laboratory tests (Most commercial birds, including ours are vaccinated) Paralysis - poisoning/stroke

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SYMPTOM CHECKER

SYMPTOM	THINGS TO CONSIDER
Messy vent	Stuck egg (egg bound) causing straining - Treat as emergency. Broken egg causing straining - Treat urgently. Prolapse - Treat urgently. Worm burden Virus or bacterial diarrhoea Starvation due to bullying or illness - Watery droppings Excess protein in the diet Eating mouldy food or drinking dirty water Kidney damage Gorging on different food e.g. windfall fruit/slugs etc. Vent gleet - distinctive odour. **TYPES OF DROPPINGS** Watery - Cooling mechanism in hot weather, otherwise lack of food. Frothy - Worms Dark red blood in droppings - Coccidiosis Bright green - Can be a sign of respiratory infections. Please note that all hens empty their cecal gland every 7 or 8th time they go - these droppings are frothy or loose, so only worry if every dropping is abnormal.
Lack of eggs, poor egg quality, soft shelled eggs.	Incorrect or poor quality diet - Diet should be 95% layers mash or pellets. Lack of grit and oyster shell. Worm burden. Old age - hybrids have a short laying career. Short daylight hours - Affects pure breed more than hybrids. Sudden shock - introduction of new birds/predator attack/low flying plane etc. Illness. Eggs being taken by rats/squirrels/crows etc. Egg eating. Infectious bronchitis (most commercially hatched birds are vaccinated).
Odd behaviour.	Bullying - a timid hen will dart in and out of the other birds - Ensure she is eating enough. Broodiness - If she sits tight on the nest and squawks at you its probably broodiness. Stuck egg - Going in and out of the nest box. Head shaking - Check for signs of ear infection or mites in the ear. Reluctance to go into hen house at night - Red mite infestation in the chicken house or bullying. Egg eating Feather pecking other hens - Usually triggered by boredom.
Sudden death.	This is rare - there are usually symptoms that are easy to miss as hens can hide illness until they are beyond help. There are many causes but some more common ones are: Broken egg. Egg bound. Shock causing panic in the hens house - can result in birds flying up and breaking necks. Predator attack - polecats, ferrets, rats, foxes, badgers etc. Red Mite or Northern Fowl Mite infestation. (very common) Fatty liver disease - common in overweight birds or those on incorrect diet. Heart attacks.

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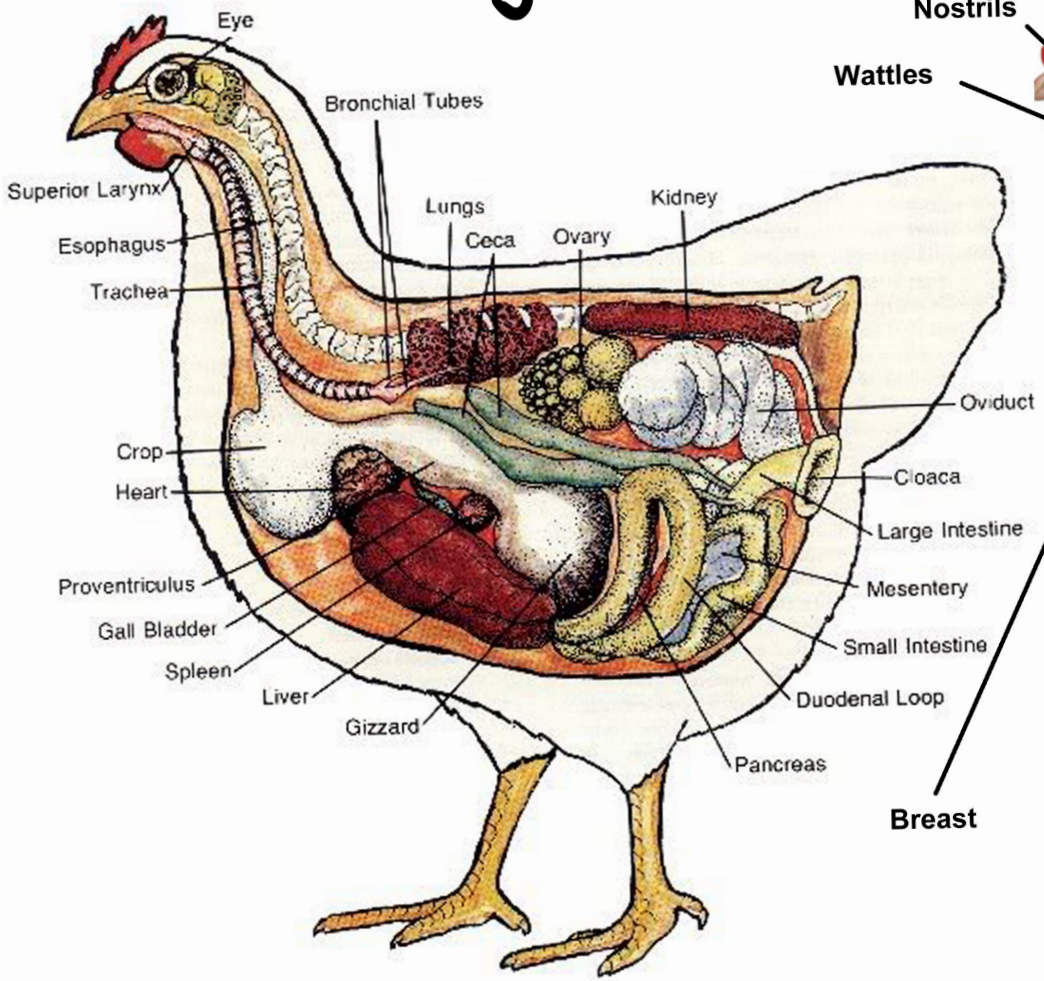
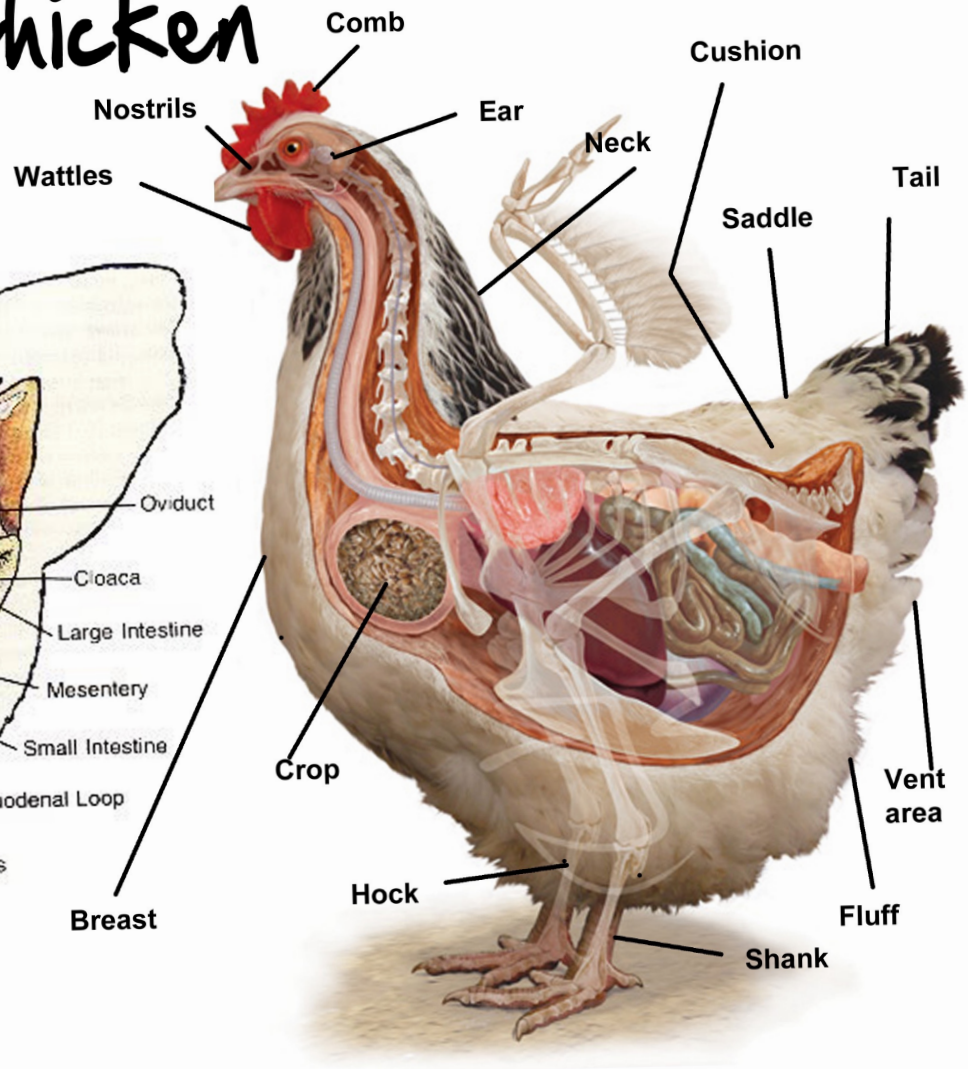
Anatomy of a Chicken





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