

Sick Chicken Symptoms You Should Recognize



While it is good to recognize sick chicken symptoms, it might be more valuable for new chicken owners to know normal, healthy chicken behavior. If you know how your chickens act when they are feeling good and healthy, you will notice when your chicken is acting peculiar.

How does the chicken look and act?

A healthy chicken is a busy chicken. It is aware of what the other chickens are doing. The healthy chicken is pecking the ground, scratching the dirt, and chasing others away from a tasty morsel. When you first open the coop in the morning, the chickens should eagerly exit the building, raring to start

a new day. They should be happy to see food added to the bowls or feeders and start eating. Any chickens who stay on the roost, or worse, are hiding in a dark corner should be immediately and gently checked over.

When you look at a healthy chicken it looks – healthy! Feathers are glossy and in place, the comb and wattles are waxy looking and full color, and the eyes are bright and clear.



Healthy Chickens are Communicating

Chickens talk to each other during the day, and some chickens talk a lot! When you spend time with your chickens you will start to recognize certain sounds that are made repeatedly. While my chickens are free ranging, I am often doing cleaning chores around the barnyard. But, sometimes I hear a certain sound coming from my chickens and I just know it is an alarm

of some sort. Whether they saw a predator, noticed a hawk in the sky, or were injured by another flock member, the sound is unmistakably alarming. It differs greatly from the regular clucking and squawking that they make.

Another alarming sound is any respiratory sound. A healthy chicken doesn't make noise while breathing. Coughing, heavy breathing sounds and raspy sounds are signs of serious illness and should be evaluated quickly. With the current wave of avian influenza sweeping the country, it would be good to familiarize yourself with avian influenza symptoms.

Healthy Chickens have Healthy Droppings

Some may feel this goes a bit too far, but notice the chicken's droppings. There are two basic types of droppings that are excreted daily. One type is often seen first thing in the morning. It is firmer and capped with white urine salts. Less frequently, the chicken will expel a runnier brown or green, cecal dropping. While both of these droppings will have a slight odor, you should notice if the odor is extremely bad or the appearance is really out of the normal range for your flock. Keep in mind that certain vegetables, such as beet greens may turn the droppings a different color temporarily, without the chicken appearing ill.



Healthy Chickens have Healthy Appetites

Chickens who are unwell do not eat much. Sometimes they stop eating completely. This is another reason it is good to observe your flock when you are feeding. If a chicken does not come for food, stays off to itself, and is not pecking at the ground for insects or morsels, something could definitely be wrong. What follows next is weight loss, another sign of illness. Young chickens are continually growing and maturing. A young chicken who does not eat enough will not gain weight like the others in the flock. The young birds continue to fill out in size for the first 6 months. Even after egg laying begins, some growth and weight gain can still be occurring.

Older hens and roosters should be able to maintain their

weight. The older hen that begins to look scrawny and small, may be suffering from an undetected illness. Some of my chickens prefer to eat from the feeder and some prefer to free range while I am supervising. Knowing what is normal for them is also a good indication of how they are doing health wise.

Healthy Young Hens are Laying Eggs

Many factors can influence egg laying, including age, molting, weather, stressful environment, and placement of nesting boxes. If you reliably get an egg a day from a good laying hen, and then she stops laying, you may wonder why have my chickens stopped laying? The quality of the egg shell can also be a sign of problems. Thin, weak shells can be caused by inadequate nutrition or inadequate mineral absorption. Knowing what to feed chickens will help you avoid any illnesses due to inadequate nutrition.



Assessing Sick Chicken Symptoms

Chicken diseases and illness can be caused by a number of things. Viruses, bacteria, molds, fungus, and parasites are the infectious type of illness. Often, if one of these occur, more than one bird will be affected. Some sick chicken symptoms are mild, leading to a day or two of not feeling up to par and exhibiting a low appetite. Other diseases, such as avian influenza can and will wipe out the flock in a matter of days. My recommendation is to not panic when signs of illness are observed. When you see sick chicken symptoms in your flock, assess the birds overall health. First, isolate the sick chicken, to help prevent the spread of any possible contagious illness.

Sick Chicken Symptoms

Is the chicken:

- **active or listless**
- **grooming or is it unkempt with ruffled feathers**
- **interested in eating**
- **coughing or expelling fluid**
- **able to stand on its own**

And

- **Is the hen still laying eggs**
- **Is the bird excreting normal or abnormal droppings**

Prevention

Prevention and a healthy diet will go a long way to warding off serious illness. Feeding an appropriate healthy diet, supplementing with herbs, and treating the chickens with probiotic rich foods will help them preventing many minor illnesses. Fermented feed, apple cider vinegar (2 tablespoons

in a gallon of water), garlic powder added to the feed(sprinkled on top), will all help build a strong immune system in your flock. Clean and sanitary conditions are also important. Removing droppings that attract flies, keeping the coop dry and well ventilated, replace soiled wet bedding immediately will all help the birds stay healthy.

