

Chicken Care and Management



NorCal
Veterinary Services

Dedicated to the health of your business...

Housing Management

Chickens require an environment with good drainage and adequate predator proof fencing (ideally buried wire fencing from 20cm underground).

They should have a secure chicken coop, which contains perches and nesting boxes, it should be bedded with straw or shavings and the coop should be well ventilated and watertight. It is advisable that the birds have around 1 sq ft per bird floorspace in the coop and 2 sq m per bird in the run.

Feeding

Commercial chicken feeds are available but different feeds should be provided for different ages. Chick crumbs should be fed from hatch to 5 weeks old, growers mash or pellets should be fed from 6 weeks to 18 weeks and layers mash or pellets should be fed from 18 weeks as they come into lay. However, avoid sudden changes in food, instead change gradually over a couple of weeks.

A good supply of calcium should be available within the chicken's diet for egg production. Mixed grit should also be available as chickens do not have teeth so require it to help their digestion. Fresh water should be supplied and kept topped up throughout the day to ensure they remain hydrated and can continue laying.

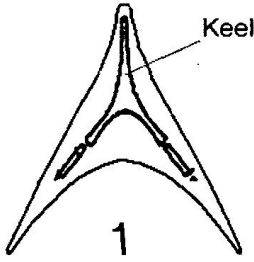
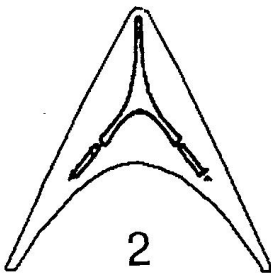
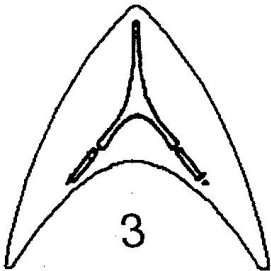
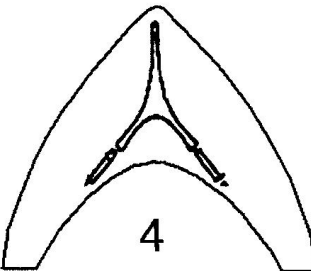
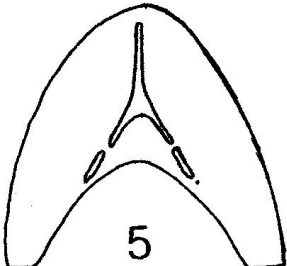
Feed can be fed adlib from a feeder; it is important that the food is kept fresh and dry. Scattering food on the ground instead of using a feeder can attract wild birds and rodents which can be carriers of disease.

Do not feed any waste that from a domestic or commercial kitchen, including from a vegetarian kitchen.

Body Condition Scoring

We use body condition scoring to rate how thin or fat an animal is. We use a scale of 1-5. To body condition score,

This is a good way of monitoring how much extra feed your chickens may need or whether they need a bit of a diet! We recommend pet chickens to have a BCS of 2.5 – 3.5.

	Score	Characteristics
	1	Prominent ridge on the keel with limited overall breast muscle and a concavity of the breast muscle alongside the keel
	2	Greater development of breast muscle which is not concave and feels more or less flat. Keel still prominent.
	3	Moderately developed convex breast muscle. Keel less prominent.
	4	Well developed relatively plump breast. Smooth over the keel.
	5	Overly developed breast muscle. Muscle protrudes over keel, keel difficult to palpate.

<https://nagonline.net/3877/body-condition-scoring/>

Egg Production

Egg production varies according to the breed, but expect no more than 1 egg/day. There may be some days that they do not lay an egg. The number of eggs produced will also gradually decrease with age, this is also breed and diet dependent. This could decline to around 1-2 eggs/week when they become 7-8 years old. Diets rich in protein are ideal for supporting egg production. Chickens will start to eat again after they have laid, a few hours later the next egg will start being produced, so take care whilst handling in the evenings whilst shells are soft.

Handling

It's important to introduce your chickens to being handled early on so that they become tame and are easier to catch and handle. Regularly handling and checking your chickens over will enable you to keep a better eye on them.

To pick up your chickens use both hands to gently pin the wings to her side, this will stop them flapping so you can lift them up. Then place your middle finger in between her legs and your index, and fourth finger outside of the legs. Use your other hand to hold your chicken close to you.

Red mite

Red mite is an external parasite which can live within a chicken house in cracks and crevices near roosting areas and perches, and feed on the birds at night, so you may not see them on the birds in the day. Red mites can cause irritation, feather loss, reduced egg production and pale combs and wattles. Good hygiene and using red mite drugs can help prevent and control red mites. Please ask a vet if you suspect red mites in your chickens.

Worming

Chickens can be susceptible to internal parasites. Therefore, it is advisable to practice good husbandry techniques, try to rotate their outdoor area every so often and worm them every few months. Worms can cause your chickens to experience weight loss, diarrhoea, and lack of appetite. If you are worried about worms in your chickens, please feel free to contact us for more advise.

Other

It's a good idea to keep a diary/calendar or a book to help plan and record management and treatment of your chickens. For any medication, you should record:

- **Name of the animal treated**
- **Name of the product/drug**
- **Dosage**
- **Batch number and expiry date**

You can also use this book to keep a record of vaccinations and body condition scores.

If you are at all concerned about your animals please call us, we have a **vet available on the phone 24/7** to help you in an emergency or offer advice.

We are happy to teach you any skills you may need, please just ask!

Common conditions in chickens

Crop impaction

Crop impactions can occur when there is something causing partial or complete blockage of food passage. Some reasons can include, a chicken eating some string, long blades of grass, feathers, and other objects.

The chicken may have some or all of these: an enlarged crop, reduced number of droppings, reduced appetite, and thirst, twisting neck side to side, inactivity, and dullness.

Sour crop

Sour crop is a fungal infection of the crop and be secondary to many causes. Signs that may be seen: foul smell from the chicken's mouth, behaviour changes, a reduced appetite, depression, white patches on the inside of the bird's mouth and may have abnormal watery droppings.

If the bird lethargic, depressed, decreased eating and drinking, call the vet!

Egg peritonitis

Causes reduced egg production, the chicken may lay thin shelled, soft shelled or deformed eggs. Also, the bird may be less active, and be drinking and eating less.

Feather loss

Feather loss occurs as part of a normal moult however if separate to this could be due to a nutritional problem, stress, bullying between the chickens or parasites (including lice and red mites).