CHICKEN DISEASES/PROBLEMS AND SOME NATURAL REMEDIES

The essence of good chicken husbandry is providing the maximum conditions that mimic poultry's natural environment and encourages/uses its intrinsic behaviours to create food and fertility in the backyard.

Preventative Actions to Minimise Health Problems in Chickens:
Poor health can result in loss of egg production right up to death of an entire flock. Your role is to:
- Provide dry, predator-proof living conditions - wet conditions create work!
- Clean out house and straw yard quarterly - have compost area nearby
- Use probiotics such as yoghurt, kefir, whey powder, fermented apple cider vinegar
- Ensure hens get plenty of green pick daily, either free-range or brought to yard
- Fresh water daily is imperative. On hot days provide lots of shade.
- Quarantine any sick birds immediately - have a quarantine house away from poultry yards
- Quarantine any new stock coming onto property for 2 weeks to check for incubating diseases.
- Understock rather than overstock.

Worms:
Roundworms, Tapeworms (from snails and slugs)
Causes: Warm, wet conditions and dirty chookhouses (worm cycles)
Treatment: Crushed fresh garlic in water (1 clove/4lttrs water) or two tablespoons crushed garlic in mash (4 cups pollard or bran with enough yoghurt & water to mix to a damp consistency) for 6 hens/10 bantams.
Preventative Action: Dry conditions in the chookhouse/strawyard. Fresh ground to break worm cycle- chook tractors.

Coccidiosis:
Single cell protozoa that live in gut encouraged by damp conditions (especially in chicks). They attach lining of gut/intestines causing internal bleeding. First sign is blood in the droppings - a pinkish hue. Can kill chicks.
Causes: Wet weather/damp bedding.
Treatment: Sulphaquin (antibiotic) for a serious outbreak. Chick starter feeds often have a coccidiostat in the mix.
Preventative Action: Make sure bedding is completely dry - replace straw after wet weather. Feed flock fortnightly with the probiotics, garlic/yoghurt/apple cider vinegar in bran/pollard mash.

Lice:
Blood suckers that spend their whole life on the chook. (They will spend a day on your skin too!)
Causes: Brought in by wild birds or new hens introduced to existing flock.
Treatment: Olive oil your hands and arms up to the elbows then check around the vent feathers of chooks for moving greyish dots. Dust the chook all over (especially under wings) with yellow elemental sulphur (from produce stores and nurseries) and clean out and replace nesting box straw. Put hood (old sock) over hen's head as the sulphur can cause blindness. The oil on your arms should deter the lice invading your skin and giving you an itchy day or two.
Preventative Action: Build you chook run with small gauge mesh to prevent sparrows from entering and transferring lice. Sprinkle garden lime/dolomite on the floor before replacing the
clean straw. Make sure chooks have a dry dust bath area to which you can add lime, diatomaceous earth & dried herbs like wormwood, pennyroyal, pyrethrum.

**Red Mite or Perch Mite:**
Tiny grey insects that go red when engorged with blood. Live in the cracks in the chookhouse by day and suck blood from the hens at night. Implicated in the cause of Marek’s Disease (see below). Can cause anaemia and death.

Causes: Hot, dry weather. Brought in by wild birds like sparrows attracted to the chook grain.

Treatment: As they don't live on the chooks see below for treatment and prevention by cleaning chookhouse.

Preventative Action: Scrub or spray chookhouse wood with tea tree or eucalyptus oil (1:100 with water) or whitewash the whole chookhouse with lime/water slurry and sprinkle the floor with lime. Whitewash the perches also or if you live in an area where the turpentine or camphor laurel tree grows, use branches of these as perches after de-barking.

**Scaley Leg Mite:**
Common microscopic scabies-like mite burrows under scales and creates a smelly, crusty discharge and swollen legs eventually causing lameness. Mites can survive up to 30 days in the bedding.

Causes: Brought in by wild birds or new stock that hasn't be quarantined and treated.

Treatment: Soak affected chook’s legs in a bucket of soapy water with a little ammonia. When softened, scrub gently around the scales on the legs with an old toothbrush or nail brush to remove a lot of the built up detritus. Dry the legs and apply Vicks Vapour Rub or (or similar proprietary chest rub with eucalyptus). May have to repeat every few days.

Preventative Action: Build you chook run with small gauge mesh to prevent sparrows from entering and transferring lice. Blue legged chook breeds seem to be less susceptible than white or yellow-legged chooks.

**DISEASES OF POULTRY:**
When you see a chook hunched and listless with a pale drooping comb possibly swollen eyes and very bad diarrhoea you should isolate the hen immediately into quarantine in case she infects the whole flock.

**QUARANTINE:** Put fowl in a warm, dry box with bedding and supply 500mL drinking water with a clove of garlic + 1 tspn calcium ascorbate powder (supermarkets) + vitamins like Pentavite. Allow them to rest quietly. Inspect for parasites or disease symptoms. If hen dies, either burn body or bury very deeply away from food crops and chooks.

**Marek’s Disease:**
Also known as fowl paralysis, the chook goes lame on one side then the wing droops, they give up eating and die.

Causes: It’s a virus spread by feather dust (possibly by wild birds) and can transfer via the mother into a hatching egg.

Treatment: Nil. Should cull as soon as diagnosed as is a terrible death.

Preventative Action: Perhaps excluding wild birds from area using small gauge wire might help prevent an infestation.

**OTHER POULTRY PROBLEMS AND BAD HABITS**
**Egg Bound**
Eggs get stuck in the lower oviduct. Chook praters and keeps squatting trying unsuccessfully to lay egg.
Causes: Can be hereditary.

Treatment: Oil the vent with vegetable oil and hold over a steam bath to loosen vent. Can gently guide the egg externally with fingers till it appears in vent, then gently ease out. If unsuccessful, insert oiled index finger into vent, find egg and break it gently to remove every bit of shell. Squirt 10mls olive oil into vent, and isolate chook in a warm box to recover. Chooks can die if all of egg is not removed.

Preventative Action: Don't breed from a chook that has this problem.

Wounds:

Causes: Fighting within the heirarchy. Dog/fox/cat attack.

Treatment: A few drops in an eyedropper of Homeopathic Arnica and Rescue Remedy (Bach Flower Essences) internally. Bathe wound with Calendula and Hypericum tea. Isolate in warm box with garlic/Vitamin C in water.

Preventative Action: Provide safe, predator proof housing and don't overstock. (20 chooks is the max. for one group)

Poisoning:

Moping, diarrhoea, convulsions, loss of mobility, paralysis and sudden death are symptoms.

Causes: Chooks have browsed on poisonous plants in garden or eaten rotten food scraps.


Preventative Action: Avoid growing poisonous plants like: rhubarb leaves, deadly nightshade (solanum nigrum - henbane), potato seed balls, oleander, lily of the valley, hemlock and green potatoes. Botulism also kills chooks and is caused by rotting food scraps. Always clean up uneaten food stuffs and hang food in a wire basket to keep it clean.

Egg Eating:

Causes: Accidental breakage due to too many eggs in the nesting box. Possibly due to throwing used eggshells as is back into the chook yard. Sometimes chooks are looking for more protein also.

Treatment: Cull the offending chook (if you can find it), blow and egg and refill it with hot mustard and leave in nest. Increase the green pick and protein levels in the diet in case of deficiencies.

Feather Picking:

Causes: Boredom and stress. Can ultimately lead to cannibalism.

Treatment: Cull the offender.