

How to Help a Sick Chicken

By Dalia Monterroso, aka The President of Chickenlandia

As a Backyard Chicken Educator, I'm often meeting people at the beginning of their chicken keeping journey. I get to see the nervousness when baby chicks arrive home, the delight when they reveal their little personalities, and the pride when they discover their first egg. Unfortunately, one thing I also witness frequently is the panic of a new chicken keeper when they realize one of their beloved flock members is sick.

Chickens are spry, curious animals. A healthy chicken seems to never stop moving. As they peck and scratch about the yard, you should observe them twitching and cocking their heads as they tirelessly search for something tasty. Their constant motion makes it that much more distressing to see one puffed up and staring into space. A sick chicken will be listless, droopy, and will very likely have less interest in food. They will often remain in a corner of the coop or find a distant bush outside to hide under. If they are still wandering about with their flock, you might see them moving slower, walking different, or displaying respiratory symptoms.

The first thing I tell anyone to do when they find a sick chicken is take a deep breath and try not to panic. Of course, all of my advice goes straight out the window when I'm dealing with my own flock! Yes, I panic, and I understand with all my heart why others do as well. Caring for something that can't tell you what's wrong is hard. Add in the fact that veterinary care is often inaccessible or unrealistic, and it's an even a more understandably stressful situation.

It's for this reason that I created my simple and easy to remember R.E.S.T. protocol. Here's what it stand for:

- R - **Remove** your Chicken from the Flock
- E - Offer **Electrolytes**, Vitamins, and Probiotics
- S - Offer **Scrambled Eggs**
- T - Control the **Temperature**

Of course, there's more things you need to do depending on what specifically is going on. But these are very easy and basic points to remember in an emergency situation. So let's go over each item.

Remove your Chicken from the Flock:

Your chickens share everything, including pathogens. One sick chicken does not usually mean your whole flock will get sick but it's better safe than sorry. There's also the unfortunate nature of the pecking order to consider, which places weaker chickens vulnerable to attack by their friends. Lastly, just like humans, chickens need to rest in order to have a chance at recovery. It's best for them to have a nice quiet place to relax in.

Electrolytes, Vitamins, and Probiotics:

Remember when you got sick as a kid and your mom gave you Gatorade? That's because when we're sick, we are in danger of getting dehydrated. We also probably weren't eating much, so the extra vitamins really helped. It's great to have an electrolyte formula made for chickens on hand, or find a recipe online that you can make yourself. Some premade formulas also have probiotics, and we all know that gut health is important for overall resilience.

Scrambled Eggs:

Another thing my mom gave me when I was sick was chocolate pudding. I know, I know, chocolate pudding isn't a health food! But in my mom's mind, I needed to eat *something*. She wanted me to get my strength up, and her instincts weren't far off. Sometimes, a chicken's digestive system needs a rest while their bodies work on getting well. But by the time you have discovered they are sick they probably haven't been eating for a while. Chickens that don't eat for too long can literally lose the will to live. So scramble up some eggs and get a good dose of protein, fat, and other nutrients into their bodies.

Temperature Control:

When chickens aren't well, their little systems are working overtime to recover. The last thing we want them to do is expend more energy trying to stay warm or cool. This is why I say to bring them inside, or at the very least into a garage or shop where the temperature is more mild than their coop. That way, they can focus on what they need to: recovery.

So, that's my simple R.E.S.T. method for sick chickens. It's not a magic pill, just good old fashioned TLC that will hopefully have a positive effect while you rule out what the problem could be. If you'd like to watch a video about the R.E.S.T. method, you can do so by clicking the play button below. And always remember that even if your chicken doesn't make it, they lived their life outside of a factory farm and under your loving care. That's really the best any chicken could ask for.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z110OFNF6zY&t=527s>