

## Impacted Crop Surgery

**\*\*MY DISCLAIMER\*\*** I am not a Veterinarian! My advice is based solely on my personal chicken adventures and my education/experience as a veterinary technician. It is always best to seek veterinary care when a pet is ill. **IT IS ALWAYS BEST TO SEEK VETERINARY CARE WHEN A PET IS ILL!** Ok, now that I have yelled we can continue... 😊

### What is an impacted crop?

An impacted or blocked crop is caused by a foreign object blocking feed from passing through the small passageway that leads from crop to the proventriculus. A blockage can also be caused from grazing on long grass or hay, which can form a ball and 'clog' the passage of feed material. Foreign objects in the gizzard can occur as well, and symptoms mimic that of a crop impaction. If surgery is performed and condition does not improve, or your findings in her crop contents are normal, this could be indicative of issues in the gizzard.

### How will you know if your bird has a crop problem?

An impacted crop will present itself as a very hard, firm, bulging ball. Stools may still pass but could be yellow, green, foamy and runny. A good indication of a crop problem is to isolate your bird and pull food and water up overnight (note: please be sure bird is not already dehydrated; you may provide some water to provide vitamins via syringe or in water the day before pulling food and water). If the crop is still full in the morning after 12 full hours with no intake of solids or liquids, chances are there is an underlying digestive problem.



### Important things to consider before deciding on surgery:

First things first: before even considering doing surgery on your chicken, ask yourself the following questions: Are you sure you are dealing with an impaction? Many people misdiagnose their own chicken as having a blockage or impaction, when in reality they are dealing with an infected, also known as 'sour' crop, caused by high levels of bacteria or yeast or both. An impacted crop will feel extremely hard to the touch; whereas an infected crop will also be full and slow to empty, but will have a more spongy or water balloon like feel to it. If you remotely think it could be infection and not a blockage... Seek veterinary care. Your bird needs antibiotics and/or anti fungal meds. Bowel movements and other symptoms may look the same in both conditions. Secondly, how long has your bird been suffering with this, and is she healthy and strong enough to go through a surgery and recuperate? You have already pulled food and water overnight. Lethargy, puffiness, anorexia, and general malaise are common signs in a bird with an impaction. Even if your bird makes it through surgery... There is a long recovery road ahead. Do not wait until it is too late and her health has deteriorated. Act now! Lastly, are you confident in your skills, can you commit to the recovery time post op, and do you have the right supplies?

### But I have heard of this method to clear a crop blockage...

Many non-invasive treatments to 'fix' a blockage are circulating. Tubing with oil seems to be a popular yet potentially lethal method. Anytime you tube a bird, you run the risk of aspiration. If a chicken was to accidentally aspirate a bit of oil (meaning some gets in lungs) mortality rate is extremely high. There really is no coming back from an oil aspiration. Another popular method is to induce vomiting by holding your bird upside down. This rarely works for an impaction as the crop contents are packed tight (Have you ever gotten sick after eating pizza or a hamburger? The bread hurts coming up... If it comes up at all!). Even if you are dealing with an infected crop, while you may be successful in expelling the contents, this will not kill the bacteria or yeast build up. Proper medications are vital. ACV will not cure an impaction or infected crop; in infected crops, it will only multiply the acidity.



## Supplies for Surgery:

- \*Puppy potty pads
- \*4-5 towels
- \*Distilled water and baking soda solution  
(1 tbsp baking soda per 16 oz of water)
- \*60cc syringe with feeding tip
- \*Size 15 blade, or NEW exacto knife
- \*Derma bond glue (or superglue)
- \*Suture material
- \*Gauze pads soaked in betadine or chlorhexiderm solution)
- \*A supportive helper with extra set of hands
- \*Paper towels
- \*Sharpie marker
- \*Scissors

## Post Op Supplies:

- \*Wound dressing (Banixx, Veterycin)
- \*Broad spectrum oral antibiotic (Smz-tmp is a good one)
- \*Liquid diet (I prefer Harrison's Junior parrot food)
- \*A warm, quiet place inside and away from other birds for post op care
- \*A homemade crop bra or a purchased one in case of incision picking



FIONA IN HER  
HOME-MADE CROP BRA

Gretchen Suggs 2014

## Surgery:

Place puppy pads down on the table where surgery will be performed

Trim feathers away from the crop area

Fold up 2-3 towels to rest her head and elevate to avoid any fluid getting into lungs during flushing.

Make a chicken burrito by wrapping her in a towel - leaving crop exposed - and lay her on her side with head slightly elevated on the towels

Have your helper hold her, with head as stable as possible

Have paper towels and a towel for drying purposes

Clean area with your iodine/betadine or chlorhex soaked scrub gauze.

Scrubbing can also help show where blood vessels are (though in a bird with dark skin it is hard to see them)

Decide where your incision will be. You want to stay away from the bottom portion of the crop or you risk fluids and feed material leaking out post-op. Mark your incision with your sharpie to be about 1.5 inches. Start from top of crop and go towards chest so incision is horizontal to table with her lying on side.

Cover her face with a towel and with blade, make an incision following your line, from top to bottom, on the outer layers of skin, trying to avoid the blood vessels the scrub showed... most times there is little bleeding  
You will then see the crop muscle.

Make an incision through the crop muscle about the same length.

Crop contents can now be seen

Using the end of the empty 60cc syringe, carefully dig out some (at least 1/2) of the crop contents through incision,

At this point **BE SURE HER HEAD IS ELEVATED WITH TOWELS!**

Once you have removed at least 1/2 of crop contents, you can start flushing with your baking soda solution.

Keep syringe pointed towards chest while flushing. I prefer the baking soda, as it will help neutralize. Some use Epsom salt water or plain saline.

Continue rotating between flushing and 'scooping' contents out until completely empty of debris.

Dry around the crop muscle with paper towel or sterile gauze and suture crop muscle closed with dissolvable suture.

Next take skin glue or superglue and place a line of glue over sutures.

Next close skin over muscle with glue or preferably sutures.

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CROP SURGERY  
VIDEOS ON YOUTUBE

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**Post-Op:**

Keep chicken isolated, warm, quiet, and on towels or puppy pads. No shavings! (Fiona was so hungry she tried to eat the shavings)

Apply wound dressing (I like Banixx) to skin two to three times a day

The broad-spectrum antibiotic should be given orally twice a day for at least 5 days and up to a week.

Watch for drainage (A little is not a bad thing).

No food first day just water with supplements (I prefer nutridrench)

Day 2 through 4 add a little parrot feeding formula (I chose not to tube feed and risk more trauma to the tissue... Fiona was able to 'drink' her liquid diet on her own.)

Gradually up the consistency of the liquid diet, (scrambled egg mash is good) till she is back to normal food.

If she starts picking at incision, utilize your crop bra

Keep inside until incision fully healed



**FIONA, 2 MONTHS AFTER SURGERY!  
FEELING WONDERFUL!**