

A Guide to Common Duck Diseases



Domestic Duck Breeds Don't Get Sick Often

Domestic duck breeds are generally extremely hardy and don't often get sick as long as they are fed a healthy diet, given plenty of room to exercise and access to fresh water daily, but there are some fairly common duck diseases that you should be aware of if you raise backyard ducks. Hopefully you will never have to treat any of these illnesses, but it's always best to be prepared.

Hardware Disease/Botulism/Aspergillosis

What do ducks eat? Just about anything.

Ducks love to eat shiny things including spare change, screws, bolts, wire, staples or pieces of metal, which can lead to a duck disease called "hardware disease," which isn't really a duck disease at all but rather a type of poisoning. Signs of poisoning, whether it be from hardware disease, botulism, which is caused by bacteria found in stagnant water, or aspergillosis, which is caused by mold spores in wet feed or bedding, include lethargy, diarrhea, decreased appetite/weight, seizures, dehydration, vomiting, drooping wings, unsteadiness or difficulty walking. Toxins can work quickly, so while a visit to a vet is highly recommended in a suspected poisoning situation, feeding some molasses can help flush the toxin, as can charcoal pills, followed by lots of fresh, clean water, and of course removing the offending metal, dirty bedding or water or spoiled feed.

To prevent all kinds of poisoning, be sure your duck yard is free of debris, standing water, and that your ducks have lots of healthy treats, good-quality feed and clean, fresh water.



Bumblefoot/Staph Infection

The heavier duck breeds including Pekins and Appleyards can be susceptible to bumblefoot, which is basically a staphylococcus infection caused by a cut, hard landing or splinter. It manifests itself as a black scab on the bottom of the foot. Often catching it early enough means it can be treated using Vetericyn or an herbal salve to draw out the infection, but more advanced cases often require surgery to cut out the kernel of infection with a scalpel and then keeping the foot clean and dry until a new scab forms.



Sticky Eye/Eye Infection

Debris, a scratch or rough mating can all cause eye infections in ducks. Their sinuses run down the back of their head, so often eye issues and respiratory issues go hand in hand in ducks. Symptoms of an eye infection include a closed eye, bubbling eye, redness or tearing. Cleansing the eye well with saline and then making sure the duck has access to a nice, deep water bowl to submerge her entire head can often clear up the problem, but if it doesn't seem to get better in a few days, a compress of steeped chamomile tea or goldenseal can help clear up the irritation. A more serious infection might require Vet-Rx, a natural camphor-based solution that can be added to the water or applied to the

nostrils.

Impacted Crop

Since ducks will eat practically anything they can get hold of, they sometimes suffer impacted crop if they ingest a long pieces of string, twine, plastic or even rubber bands. A crop should be empty in the morning, since ducks digest everything they eat overnight, so if you suspect impacted crop, gently massage the area, then offer grit, some olive oil and plenty of water. Be sure to keep the area your ducks roam in free of any potentially dangerous materials, and if you feed your ducks cut grass or weeds, be sure to cut them into fairly short lengths.



Prolapsed Penis/Vent

A prolapse occurs when a portion of the oviduct pushes outside the duck's body while she's laying an egg, or the drake's penis doesn't retract after mating. In both cases, it can correct itself on its own, but it's a good idea to keep the area clean, and apply some coconut oil and sugar for a few days to tighten the skin tissue and keep it soft. For either a duck or a drake suffering a prolapse, it's a good idea to separate them to prevent mating while the prolapse is healing. You can try to carefully push the prolapse back inside if you don't see any

improvement in a few days. And allowing your flock plenty of room to exercise and a healthy diet can help prevent prolapses in your flock. In extreme cases, a visit to the vet might be in order. A drake's penis will fall off anyway in the fall and he grows a new one each spring, so that should correct the problem, in a duck's case, often the prolapse of her vent will recur and not be able to be successfully treated.

Wet Feather

Ducks not allowed regular access to water in which to swim, or ducks in generally poor health or kept in unsanitary conditions can suffer wet feather, a condition where their preen gland, which they use to keep their feathers well-oiled and waterproofed, stops working. This leads to the duck not being able to stay dry in the rain or water, and risking the chance of drowning or getting chilled. If your duck seems to not be waterproof any more, give her a bath in Dawn detergent, then rinse her well and blow dry her. This will remove any dirt and old oil and give her a chance to start over. Only give her a tub of water to drink out of and splash water over herself for a few days and then allow her pool access again to see if she

has regained her waterproofing. Severe cases often require the duck to go through a molt and grow in all new feathers before she is waterproof again.

Wry Neck

Wry neck is a condition that normally only affects ducklings. It can be fatal if not treated, since the ducklings is unable to hold its head up and will often not be able to walk correctly. Wry neck can be caused by a vitamin deficiency, blow to the head, or ingestion of toxins. Adding B1 and E vitamins, as well as selenium to the duckling's diet can reverse the condition. You can supplement with vitamin capsules, or add some brewers yeast, bran, sunflower seeds or wheat germ to their diet or some herbs and spices such as parsley, sage, thyme, cinnamon, spinach, dandelion greens, alfalfa, marjoram or turmeric, which contain both Vitamin E and selenium.

Regardless of the duck type, ducks are far more cold-hardy and healthier in general than chickens. You shouldn't encounter too many issues with duck diseases. It's easy to research ducks and duck breed pictures. So, why not consider a few for your backyard flock?