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## How to Prevent Chicken Pecking (cannibalism)

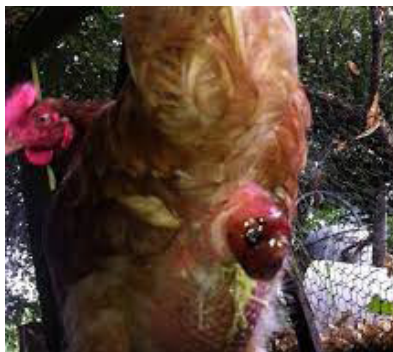
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## How to Prevent Chicken Pecking (cannibalism)

### What is cannibalism?

Cannibalism is a behaviour where chicken peck feathers, flesh or vent of other chicken. It can cause a wound. Injured birds with wounds attract other birds which may worsen the injury through pecking at the wound site. Cannibalism is caused by deficiencies of critical minerals such as phosphorus and amino acids, This often occurs when the chicken are stressed. Pecking may cause deaths.



*Death and vent injury caused by pecking (cannibalism)*

### What are the common causes of cannibalism?

- Overcrowding
- Excessive heat
- Excessive light: Extremely bright light or prolonged period of light causes hostility between chicken.
- Inadequate feed or water
- Lack of enough nutrients such as amino acids, salt and mineral
- Mixing different ages of chicken or species of birds

- Brightly lit or inadequate nests
- Mixing slow feathering, injured or sick birds with the rest of the flock.
- Introducing new birds in the flock.
- Prolonged protrusion of the vent results in vent pecking.

### **Prevention of cannibalism**

- In the chicken house allow at least 2 sq feet per bird for chicken more than 16 weeks of age .
- Brood young chicks at 35 °C and ensure brooder temperatures are reduced at 5 °C per week until 3 weeks of age.
- Do not use large white bulbs (more than 40 Watts for brooding; instead use 15–25-watt bulb to avoid excessive lighting.
- Only provide light between 8-12 hours per day.
- Provide birds with adequate feed and water.
- Provide adequate feeders and waterers: 12litre drinker and 10kg feeder are enough for 5 to 10 adult chicken.
- Provide feeds with minerals, salts and amino acids.
- Do not mix chicken of different ages and species.
- Provide an adequate number of nests: one nest of 12 inches cubed is enough for three hens.
- Place nest boxes in dark safe area.
- Separate slow-feathering and injured birds from the flock
- Promptly dispose off dead birds
- Supervise new introductions to the flock to intervene if pecking is out of control
- It is advisable to introduce new birds in the night.

- Prevent protrusion of the vent by; keeping hens from being overweight with a low energy diet and reducing light intensity to prevent young birds from laying early.
- Build a chicken run, where birds can run and get busy pecking on grass, insects and others
- Provide green leafy vegetables that fill the crop of chicken and keep them busy.
- Trim the beaks (debeak) of birds with a tendency of pecking others

### **What is debeaking?**

- This is trimming of the beak by removing one-third of the tip of the upper beak to prevent pecking the flesh of other chicken (cannibalism).



***Bird with a sharp beak***



***Debeaked bird***

- Debeaking is done using an automated electrical debeaker or manually using a hot blade, knife or scissor.



*Automatic beak trimming machine and electrical hand debeaker*

### **When is debeaking done?**

- Debeaking is done at any age
- To prevent cannibalism in the brooder, debeak chicks on day of hatching.
- Debeaking should be done as soon as cannibalism is noticed

### **Is debeaking harmful?**

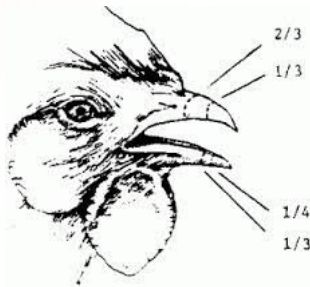
- It is a standard management practice and not harmful.
- It should be done by a veterinarian.
- The best practice is to debeak using an electrical debeaker.

### **How to debeak chicken using a knife or blade**

- Place the knife or blade on a stove or charcoal and allow to be red hot.
- Let someone hold for you the chicken's legs and the head towards you.

- Hold the bird's head in your right hand with the thumb and forefinger holding the beak open.
- Gently cut the upper beak to the  $\frac{2}{3}$  length using a hot blade or knife.
- Rub the cut surface of the beak against the hot blade to stop bleeding.
- Take care not to burn the chicken's tongue.

NB: Chicks can be debeaked using finger nail clippers. Debeaking should be done by trained and experienced people. Do not debeak a flock that is not in good health or undergoing vaccination. Give birds anti-stress and multivitamins before and after debeaking.



*Chicken beak showing length at which debeaking is done*



*Debeaking using an electrical debeaker*



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A background image of several brown and white chickens in a farm setting, partially obscured by a green and orange decorative border at the bottom.