

Prevention of Egg Eating

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Egg eating by hens is a habit formed over time which is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to break. It is important you plan and manage your facilities so that the hen never gets the first taste of a broken egg.

Prevention management practices include:

1. **Reducing Traffic in the Nesting Area.** Egg breakage is a major reason why hens start eating eggs. Excessive traffic in the nesting area increases the chance of egg breakage. Some precautions which can be taken include:
 - a) Provide one 12" x 12" nest for every 4-5 hens in your flock. Never have less than 6 nesting boxes. Always locate the nests at least 2 feet off the ground and at least four feet away from the roosts.
 - b) Keep 2 inches of clean, dry nesting material in the nests at all times. Many eggs are cracked due to a lack of protective padding in nesting boxes.
 - c) Remove all broody hens from the nesting area. Broody hens reduce nesting space and cause more traffic in the remaining nests.
2. **Nutrition.** To keep the egg shells strong, feed a complete ration and supplement oyster shells free choice. The oyster shells serve as a calcium supplement to keep the shells strong.

Never feed the hens used egg shells without smashing them to very fine particles. If the hen can associate the shell to the egg; the hens are encouraged to pick at the fresh eggs in the coop.
3. **Keep Stress Minimized**
 - a) Don't use bright lights in your coops, especially near the nesting area. Bright light increases nervousness and picking habits.
 - b) Do not scare the hens out of the nesting boxes. The sudden movement can break eggs in the box and can give the hens a taste of egg and promote egg eating.
4. **Egg Eating Can Be From Outside.** Egg eating can be done by predators such as snakes, skunks, rats, weasels and other predators. If your hens are eating eggs, the hen will usually have dried yolk on their beaks and sides of their heads. Egg eating hens also can be seen scouting the nests for freshly laid eggs to consume.

If you do catch an egg eater, cull her from the flock at once. Egg eating is a bad habit that will multiply the longer you let it continue. If one hen starts eating eggs, other hens will soon follow.

Prevention is the only proven treatment. Collect eggs often and collect eggs early in the day. Most hens will lay before 10:00 am each morning. The longer the eggs are in the barn, the better the chance it will be broken or eaten.

Reviewed by Audrey McElroy, associate professor, Animal and Poultry Sciences