

Egg Laying Pigeon Hens

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Categories: husbandry, health, new keepers

...a quick and dirty guide

- * Female pigeons can start laying eggs even without a male present as early as 5 months of age.
- * Hens typically lay 2 eggs per month. Eggs are laid 24-48 hours apart. Pigeons brood their eggs for 3 weeks, then take a 1-week break.
- * Eggs can be swapped with fakes within the first 14 days after laying with no ill effects to the embryo. Even if you think they're not fertilized, strange things can happen! (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parthenogenesis>)
- * They can take long breaks between clutches depending on hormonal levels.
- * Your bird will require calcium supplementation and UVB light (if indoors) to avoid complications. We recommend using a 2.4% UVB lamp from a reputable brand like Arcadia.
- * Hormone implants or injections are NOT 100% effective at preventing laying, and they lose efficacy over time. It's best to save them for if your bird develops egg-laying complications.

Egg binding is a life threatening condition that requires emergency vet intervention 100% of the time.

more on that in a minute...

Tips from Dr. Flock

Tip #1:

Mark your calendar when your female pigeon lays their first egg, or ask the previous owner if they have this information. Similar to tracking human

ovulation, this will help you predict when your pigeon will be due to lay and establish what is considered normal between cycles.

Tip #2:

Pay close attention to your pigeon's behavior during these crucial times. You may notice what's known as "egg butt", where the female pigeon may have her body in an upside down V shape, tail angled towards the floor. Understanding your bird's normal behavior will help you recognize abnormalities should your pigeon become egg bound.

Tip# 3:

A few days before laying, your bird's poop will become voluminous, liquid, and possibly smelly. Pigeon pants cannot be reasonably worn for any useful duration during this time.

When sitting on eggs, your hen will go for long periods without defecating, which will contribute to the aroma.

To help control the mess, you can deliberately give your bird a break, even holding them over the toilet while they eliminate, so they aren't holding it for so long!

Tip #4:

Do not forcefully palpate your pigeon's abdomen unless you are confident in your ability to identify an egg. Incorrect handling can break the egg inside, leading to internal infection and poor prognosis.

Tip #5:

Recognize and be prepared for what's known as "post egg paralysis" or "egg legs". If an egg remains inside too long, it may compress the sciatic nerve, causing inflammation and temporary paralysis. You may notice "wing walking", where the bird uses their wings as crutches, if pressured to move. In this case, having Meloxicam (Rx only) on hand for pain relief can be helpful, but these effects should pass.

Your hen can exhibit these symptoms on a spectrum, ranging from limping, leaning, skipping, to temporary paralysis. Laying eggs is tough!

Tip #6:

During a difficult lay, heat relaxes muscles and thus encourages egg passage.

Try the following methods: **Heating pad:** Place your pigeon on a heating pad set to low, make sure they are able to move off the pad if they find it too warm.

Sauna method:

- * Place a warm, damp towel at the bottom of a large plastic storage bin.
- * Place your pigeon inside the bin.
- * Partially cover the bin with the lid to retain heat while allowing airflow.
- * Run a hot shower until the mirrors fog up, then place the bin in the bathroom to create the sauna-like effect.

Warm water soak: Soak your pigeon's vent in warm water and gently massage her abdomen only if you are comfortable doing so (*See tip 4*)

Egg Binding

Find an avian-experienced emergency vet **before** you face an egg-binding crisis. Contact them in advance to learn what services they offer.

Following tips 1, 2, and 3, will help you understand what is normal behavior for your bird during laying.

The general rule is to provide moist heat (80-85F) and **allow 24 hours for the bird to pass the egg**. From the moment you can see the egg exiting the cloaca, it should take only **30 minutes** to be laid.

Signs of Egg-Binding

- * Inactivity or lethargy
- * Inability or unwillingness to fly
- * Open-beak breathing
- * Tail bobbing
- * Swollen abdomen
- * Scant liquid feces or none at all

If your bird is in severe respiratory distress, do not wait;

bring the bird to the emergency vet immediately. Egg binding can become fatal quickly.

Treating egg binding at the vet can be costly. At minimum, you should always be ready to invest for an X-ray, which helps confirm the presence of an egg and its position relative to the cloaca. If surgical intervention is required, your bird will be placed under general anesthesia for ovocentesis, a procedure where the vet drains the fluid out of the egg, allowing the shell to collapse so it can be safely flushed from the oviduct.

Egg binding can be a serious and life-threatening condition, but by staying informed and prepared, you can keep your pigeon healthy. Learn to recognize the subtleties of egg laying, and don't hesitate to seek veterinary care if you're ever unsure.