

From Shell to Hell:

The Short, Miserable Lives of Chickens in India

Billions of chickens are slaughtered for food every year in India. By the year 2020, the demand for chicken flesh in India is expected to more than double. Shy and sensitive animals, chickens raised for food spend their miserable and unnaturally short lives crammed together in windowless sheds on poultry farms, which are designed to produce the maximum amount of meat with the minimum amount of space and money.

WHAT IS A 'BROILER' CHICKEN?

"Broilers" are chickens who are raised and killed for their flesh. Chickens can naturally live for more than a decade, but chickens raised for their flesh are pushed to reach their slaughter weight in about 40 to 42 days. They are often fed antibiotics, and the supporting structure of their legs, hearts and lungs typically fails to keep up with their rapidly growing bodies – this leads to problems such as ascites (accumulation of fluid in the abdomen) and sudden death syndrome.

Birds are crammed by the tens of thousands into dark, filthy sheds, where the animals' eyes are burned by the ammonia from the chickens' accumulated waste. Many birds' legs are so severely crippled that they are unable to reach food and water. During transportation to slaughter – which involves long rides in all weather extremes – broken bones are common. After they arrive at abattoirs, chickens are quickly forced into shackles and hung upside-down by their feet from conveyors. Many birds are dumped into scalding-hot defeathering tanks while they are still conscious. At small butcher shops, chickens have their throats slit on the floor or on the butcher's block in unhygienic conditions while other birds watch.

If you take a quick look at "broiler" chicken stalls, you will most likely see birds kept in rusted, filthy wire cages – often without any food or water. These chickens are on public display so that customers can choose a bird and have him or her slaughtered and plucked on the spot. Even children are subject to viewing this gruesome act, rendering them insensitive to the suffering of other living beings.

HOW DOES EGG PRODUCTION WORK?

Eggs are about as vegetarian as your chicken tikka or a mutton burger – they are a part of the chicken's reproductive system. Millions of hens used for egg production spend their entire lives confined to tiny battery cages in huge factory warehouses which hold as many as 1,500 to 2,000 cages stacked in tiers. Since cages are stacked one on top of another, faeces from the birds on top fall onto the birds below.



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P.O. Box 28260,
Juhu, Mumbai 400 049
tel. +91 22-40727382

Each cage holds six to seven birds, and the animals are crammed together so tightly that they cannot even stretch their wings. When they are about 9 days old, chicks have their sensitive beaks cut off with a searing-hot blade in a process called *debeaking*. Stress and constant rubbing against the wire cages cause hens to lose their feathers; the birds' bodies become covered with bruises, abrasions and boils.

CHICKEN IS NOT HEALTH FOOD

Consider this: Chicken flesh contains as much artery-clogging cholesterol as beef, and a single egg is loaded with more than 200 milligrams of cholesterol. Because of the extremely crowded conditions in factory farms, bacteria like salmonella and campylobacter spread like wildfire. Since eggshells are porous, bacteria can easily pass through the shells and infect the eggs. Campylobacter causes more food poisoning in the UK than any other bacteria, and the Food Standards Agency identifies chicken as a major source of campylobacter. A large percentage of chickens have a type of cancer called *leukosis*, and chickens in India often suffer from cholera. People who sit down to a daily breakfast of eggs may have an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes, new research suggests. In a long-term study of 57,000 US adults, researchers found that those who ate an egg a day were 58 to 77 per cent more likely to develop type 2 diabetes than were people who ate no eggs.

Disease is rampant in factory farms because of the filthy and cramped conditions that chickens raised for their flesh and eggs are forced to endure. According to Environmental Defense, "Antibiotics are routinely fed to healthy livestock and poultry to make them gain weight faster and to compensate for unsanitary living conditions". According to researcher Malati Puranik, who conducted a study of chickens sold all over Mumbai, "[W]e realised that poultry sold under such unhygienic conditions is a serious health hazard. Pathogens such as campylobacter and salmonella proliferate, causing severe bacterial contamination". During the evisceration process, chicken carcasses can easily become contaminated with faecal material when the birds' intestines are cut or torn and the contents leak out.

BIRD FLU

Indian health officials have confirmed a bird flu outbreak among poultry in the Nandurbar district of Maharashtra and a few northeastern states in India. The World Health Organisation says at least 91 people in seven countries have died from the H5N1 strain of bird flu since 2003. Animal factories – such as "broiler" sheds and battery hen warehouses – virtually invite the virus to strike. Because of the animals' intensive confinement, the deadly virus spreads easily. Bird flu can be transmitted to humans who handle infected birds, and experts fear the virus will eventually mutate into a form that is transmissible from human to human – potentially setting off a catastrophic worldwide pandemic.

CHICKENS: NO 'BIRD BRAINS'

Chickens are inquisitive and interesting animals who are thought to be as intelligent as cats, dogs and even primates. When in their natural surroundings – away from factory farms – they form friendships and social hierarchies, recognise one another and develop pecking orders. They love and care for their young and enjoy a full life that includes dust-bathing, making nests, roosting in trees and more.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Do not risk your family's health and contribute to animal suffering – do not buy or eat chicken! To read our "Vegetarian Starter Kit", which includes delicious meatless and eggless recipes, please visit PETAIndia.com or send an e-mail to Info@petaindia.org.

