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Gout in Poultry: A Hidden Health Challenge

Introduction:

Gout in poultry may not be a common topic among farmers, but it is a serious health issue affecting both backyard and commercial birds. Gout occurs when uric acid, a waste product in birds, builds up in the body due to poor kidney function. Unlike mammals, birds do not excrete urea; they excrete uric acid. When the kidneys are unable to remove this uric acid properly, it forms crystals that deposit in organs or joints.

There are two types of gout seen in poultry:

1. Visceral Gout – Uric acid crystals deposit on internal organs such as the heart, liver, and kidneys.

2. Articular Gout – Crystals accumulate in the joints, especially the legs and feet, causing pain and swelling.

Both types are harmful, but visceral gout often goes unnoticed until the bird dies, while articular gout shows external signs of discomfort.

Causes and Symptoms:

Gout usually begins with kidney damage caused by various factors:

- High-protein diets, especially in broilers.
- Dehydration due to lack of clean water.
- Toxins or excess calcium in feed or water.
- Incorrect use of medications, especially antibiotics.
- Viral infections like infectious bronchitis.
- Poor ventilation, overcrowding or heat stress.

Symptoms of Gout in Poultry

Visceral Gout (Internal):

- Sudden death without obvious symptoms.
- Weakness and loss of appetite before death.
- White chalky deposits on organs found during post-mortem.
- Enlarged kidneys.

Articular Gout (External):

- Swollen joints, especially in legs and feet.
- Lameness or difficulty walking.
- Sitting for long periods, reluctance to move.
- Twisting of toes or abnormal leg posture.
- Nodules or lumps around joints.
- Weight loss and general weakness.

Managing and Preventing Gout in Poultry

There is no easy cure for gout once crystals have formed, but prevention is effective and essential.

Poultry owners can take several simple steps:

1. Balanced Diet: Ensure protein and calcium levels are appropriate for the bird's age and breed. Avoid overfeeding protein-rich or low-quality feed.

2. Clean Water Access: Birds should have access to clean, cool water at all times. Even short periods of water shortage, especially in hot weather, can trigger kidney damage.

3. Avoid Toxins: Do not use medications, especially antibiotics, without veterinary advice. Some drugs are toxic to bird kidneys.

4. Good Management: Maintain proper ventilation and temperature in poultry sheds. Reduce overcrowding and ensure hygiene.

5. Routine Checks: Observe birds daily for signs of swelling, leg problems, or reduced activity. Early intervention can prevent severe damage.

Conclusion

Gout in poultry is more common than it seems and often results in painful consequences for the birds. The condition reflects poor kidney health, which is usually preventable through better nutrition, hydration and care. Poultry farmers, caregivers, and veterinarians must work together to protect flocks by ensuring clean water, balanced diets, and stress-free environments. With awareness and responsible management, gout can be largely avoided, ensuring healthier and happier birds.