

Nursing a sick animal

Taruvinga Magwirotu

Consider this scenario: your animal just wakes up looking really sick. It is off-feed, the body feels hot to the touch and it does not want to move. Maybe it shows signs of diarrhoea or hard dung (constipation). How do you help it to aid recovery?

First things first: It is always important to **spot or discover** a sick animal very early. This allows any intervention to have more chances of success. If you treat a condition/disease late, many internal organs may have been damaged beyond repair! Quick intervention is always important. It is therefore critical to have a daily routine of observing your animals at least twice each day: early in the morning and in the evening before they settle for the night.

Put it in a sick bay/paddock/house: This is important for three critical reasons. The first one is that for contagious diseases, a sick animal can be a **source** of sickness for the whole herd or flock. Secondly, sick animals **contaminate the environment** through secreting or breathing out the disease-causing microbe. Thirdly, sick animals are weak and can be attacked or savaged by others. This is especially common in chickens.

Tender loving care (TLC): This is probably the most critical aspect of nursing a sick animal. Give it attention; clean water, warmed up if necessary; appetizing, fresh food; clean environment.

Immune boosters: Sick animals, by mere fact of being sick, have a weakened immune system. Most may be off feed, which worsens the situation. A dose of multi-vitamin and minerals is in order. To stimulate gut function, opaque beer/traditional brew performs wonders in ruminant animals like cattle and goats. For example, animals suffering from Gall Sickness may have constipation. Drenching or dosing 1 to 2 litres of traditional/opaque beer rich in vitamins also stimulates gut function.

Specific or general antibiotic therapy: With professional advice, antibiotic therapy can help by directly killing microbes already circulating in the body. The important thing is to observe proper dose rates, withdrawal instructions and properly estimating/weighing your animal. Always read manufacturer's instruction written on the sleeve. Only use an antibiotic from its original container.

Refresh my tips on using antibiotics here: