





Are my pigs healthy?

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It is important to know if your pigs are healthy

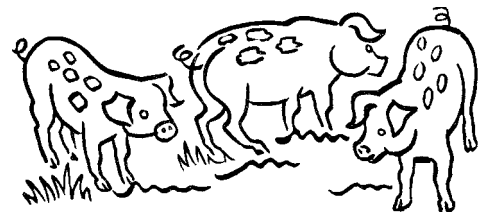
If you know this, you can

-  Treat sick pigs.
-  Change management practices to improve health and productivity.
-  Make decisions about which animals should be sold because they are old or sick.
-  Select healthy pigs when buying new ones.





How to know if your pigs are healthy





History

-  It is firstly important to know the history of the pig.
-  Has the pig appeared to be sick recently?
-  Are any of the other pigs in the herd sick?
-  If the pig is an adult, what is its breeding history? If a female is aged and has never had young ones, or a male has never managed to make females pregnant, there could be a problem, and these pigs should not be kept for breeding purposes.

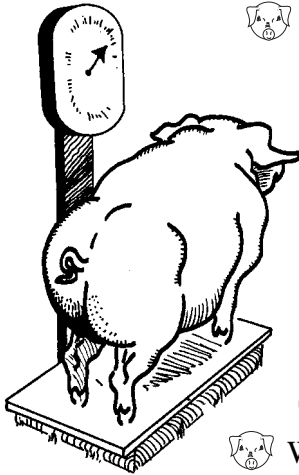



General appearance


-  Before looking too closely at the pig, it is good to look at the pig from a distance without disturbing it to look for signs of poor health.
-  Is the pig eating and drinking normally?
-  If it is a sow with piglets, is it feeding the piglets? If the piglets feed quietly, without too much fighting and squealing, and settle down to sleep after feeding, they and the sow are probably healthy.
-  Is the pig acting normally, or does it seem excited or depressed? Pigs should be lively and active (unless they are sleeping peacefully and looking restful and content), and move towards or away from sounds and approaching objects.


-  Is the pig having trouble standing or walking? Pigs normally walk rather stiffly, but should not be lame.
-  What is the conformation of the animal? If you are buying a new pig, you do not want to buy one with obvious problems.
-  Are there any obvious wounds or swellings?
-  Pigs grow quickly. If there is not much difference between the size of piglets at 2 and 4 months, there is a problem.


Closer look at the whole pig




 What is the condition of the pig? Is it in good condition, or thin, or fat? If the pig is in poor condition, has it been like this for some time and are other pigs also affected (in which case it may be because of poor nutrition or parasites) or has it suddenly lost weight? The only bones that you should see are the shoulder blades, which should be covered by a layer of flesh so that you cannot actually feel them. If the backbone, hip bones or ribs can be seen, the pig is too thin. If a pig is too fat, you can see this in the neck area, where rolls of fat develop. Very fat pigs can have problems with their feet, hearts and with breeding; they also get downgraded at abattoirs because fat pork is not popular in South Africa.

 What is the hair condition? The haircoat of modern pigs is thin. Sick pigs have a heavier coat and the hair is often dull. There should not be any hair loss.



 What is the skin condition? Are there any sores, lumps, scaly skin or hard crusts, which may be from parasites or infection? Is the pig scratching itself? Pigs often have wounds caused by fighting, and may show fly damage. Do not buy pigs with a lot of sores, as these can become infected and lead to trouble.

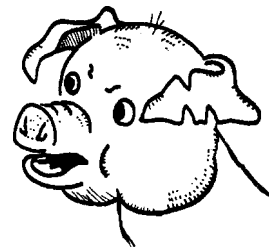
 Pigs like to lie in mud, so they may look dirty, but the body should not be soiled with blood or faeces around the tail, anus or face.

 Are there any parasites? Check for lice. These can cause loss of hair, anaemia and loss of condition.



Systematic look at different parts of the body, from head to tail

Head and neck





-  Is there any swelling of the head or neck?
-  Is the head extended or twisted in an unusual way?






Ears

-  The ears may stand up or hang forward, depending on the breed. Notches in the ears are a common way of identifying pigs. Heavy scales or crusts on the ears may be from mange.
-  Sometimes one ear may be swollen. When an ear is injured without breaking the skin, blood fills up the ear. This is called a haematoma. It usually disappears without treatment, but can become infected if the skin is broken, for example if another pig bites it.






Mouth

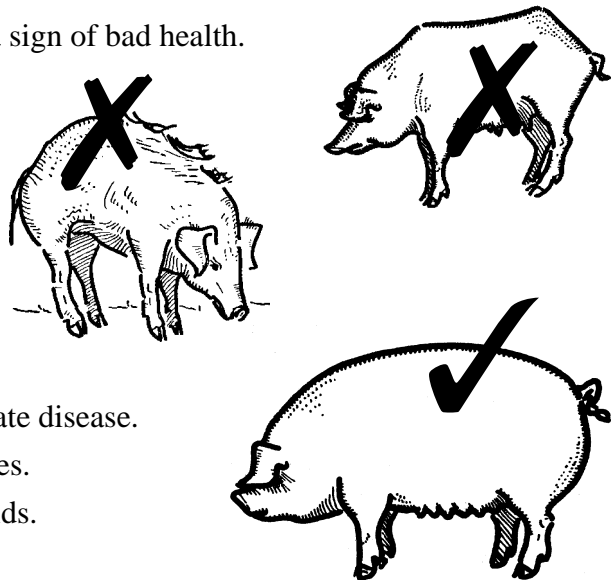
-  Are there any problems with the teeth? Modern pigs usually have the eye teeth cut off, but some pigs have quite large tusks, especially the boars. Pigs' teeth are not used to estimate the age, but if some of the front teeth are worn down and the teeth are uneven, the pig may be quite old and may not be able to eat well.
-  Is there an increase in the quantity of saliva, or other discharges from the mouth? (Note that boars often produce a lot of frothy saliva when they are excited.)
-  Are there any difficulties with swallowing, or is food regurgitated from the mouth?
-  Are there any sores or bleeding around the mouth or tongue?

Snout




-  Are there any discharges from the snout? Healthy pigs should have a cool and moist snout, but there should not be any unusual foam or discharge from the nostrils.
-  Are there any sores or bleeding on the snout?
-  Does the breath smell unusual? This can be a sign of bad health.

Eyes






-  What is the appearance of the eyes? Healthy pigs should have bright eyes, and these should not be sunken.
-  Are there any discharges from the eyes?
-  What is the colour inside the eyelids? This should be a clear pink colour, and other colours (white, yellow or bluish) could indicate disease.
-  There should not be any cloudiness of the eyes.
-  There should not be any growths on the eyelids.





Chest

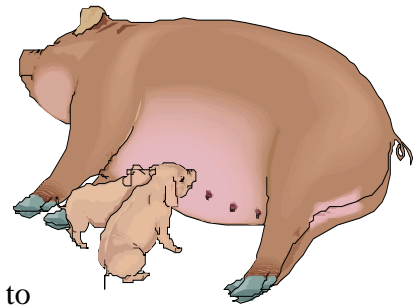
-  How is the pig breathing? Is it breathing more often than normal, or deeper than normal, or with its mouth open, or with difficulty and unusual breathing sounds such as wheezing?
-  The normal breathing rate per minute is 10 to 16.
-  Is the pig coughing or sneezing?


Belly


-  Does the size and shape of the belly look normal?
-  Are there any swellings or hernias? Look from the back to see if both sides look the same, and from the side for swelling of the navel (hernia).
-  Check the sheath and penis in a male and the vulva in a female for abnormal discharge, redness, sores or swelling.
-  Is the pig urinating normally? Check for painful urination, increased frequency of urination, loss of control of urination.
-  What does the urine look like? If it is cloudy or contains blood or pus or is a red colour then there is a problem.

 Is the pig passing faeces normally? Is there any straining from constipation? Does the pig have diarrhoea, which is watery faeces which may contain blood? Pigs with diarrhoea will often have a tail and rear area stained from faeces.


 If the pig is a female, what does the udder look like?
In the case of a new sow check the number of teats and conformation. There should be at least 10, and ideally 14 functioning teats.



 A sow with suckling piglets should appear peaceful, allow the young to suckle, and have a well-developed udder. The teats may be pink to reddish, but should not be hot or tender to the touch, and should not be hard or contain lumps. She makes a gentle grunting noise when the piglets are suckling, which means she is letting milk down.

 If the pig is a male, check the testicles. If you want to breed with the male, there should be 2 firm testicles without abnormal swellings or wounds.


Feet


 What is the condition of the feet and claws? The claws should be hard, shiny and symmetrical. Are the claws overgrown, or is there infection or discharge?

 Is there any swelling of the joints?

What should you do if there are signs that the pig is sick?

 If it is a pig you are thinking to buy, don't buy it.

 If you already have the pig, get advice from a state or private veterinarian or an animal health technician.

 If the pig is old or there is a problem which will not clear up easily, cull it.

For further information contact your nearest animal health technician or veterinarian

or



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