

# Caring for Chicks

Young chicks need to be well cared for during their first six weeks of life. This is done by providing them with quality food, fresh water, appropriate warmth, fresh air and a clean environment.

Most people feed their chicks a chick starter. This is a specially formulated feed that has appropriate amounts of vitamins and proteins. Young chicks are particularly susceptible to a disease known as coccidiosis. Most chick starter has a coccidiostat in it to help chicks develop some immunity from this disease.

Fresh water is extremely important for healthy young chicks. You should change their water every few days for the first six weeks. This process should also involve cleaning out their water container.

Young chicks need to be kept warm for about six weeks, especially during cool weather and night time. This can be done with a light bulb, but it is best to use a porcelain globe. These give off heat but do not emit light. During the first week, the porcelain globe which is usually screwed into a socket with an aluminium dome cover sits about 30cm - 50cm above the chicks. The bulb and dome combined are known as a brooder. The distance above the chicks depends on the season and the climate. At the height of the chicks' backs the temperature should be about 36 to 38 degrees Celsius during the first week. The temperature required by the chicks' drops by a few

degrees each week. To achieve this, the brooder should be moved about 4 to 6 cm higher each week.

The brooding area the chicks are kept in needs to be capable of preventing the chicks from cool draughts. A 1m<sup>2</sup> area with walls about 50cm high should be enough space for up to approximately 50 chicks during their first few weeks of life.

Fresh air is also important for young chicks. They need to be in a room large enough for air to circulate. If they are kept in a tiny enclosed shed it is likely that the methane produced from their poo will build up and make the air stale. This can create problems for the young chicks. So they need to have access to fresh air, without the possibility of getting chilled by a draught.

Young chicks need to be kept in a clean environment. Some people cover the incubation area with newspaper several layers thick. In a 1m<sup>2</sup> area with up to 25 chicks you will need to change the newspaper at least once each week; preferably twice. To help make this process easier and to keep the chicks off the cool surface of a concrete floor, it is a good idea to place the newspaper on top of some vinyl floor covering. Another alternative it to fill the brooding area with rice hulls or wood shavings.

In addition to coccidiosis, one other problem young chicks can suffer from is mareks disease. The best way of preventing this is to inject the birds with a specially formulated product that helps to immunize chicks against this disease. This is best done as soon as the chicks are removed from the incubator. Some people never have a problem with mareks disease, while others find it to be a constantly recurring problem.

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1. List the five main needs of young chicks during their first six weeks of life. \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. When purchasing chick starter, it is advisable to make sure it contains what ingredient? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What should be changed a few times each week? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Name two things that need to be cleaned out each week.  
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\_\_\_\_\_
5. What is the name of the item used to provide heat for growing chicks? \_\_\_\_\_
6. A normal globe can be used as a brooder, however providing light for chicks 24/7 tends to make them hyperactive. It is good for the first few days. What should be used instead of a normal globe? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is likely to build up in a small enclosed room? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Name two things that could be used as a floor covering when brooding young chicks? \_\_\_\_\_