

## How to Care for Baby Chicks

Three things your foster chicks need at all times:

- 1 Warmth
- 2 Water
- 3 Food



Your babies come home in a closed bin with some kind of bedding on the bottom, a feeder and a waterer, and some feed. You also have a clip-on lamp with a 75-100 watt incandescent bulb to warm the chicks. This bin can hold the chicks as they grow (fast!) for some weeks. Please find an inside place at first, unless you have a really cozy garage.

**WARMTH** Keep the light clipped to the bin's rim and swiveled straight downwards at first, for max warmth in one spot. Swap the closed lid for something that lets some air in while keeping warmth in too. A piece of chicken fence with a towel laid over it works. Bend the chicken fence around the clipped on light. You will be a Mother Hen McGyver in no time!

Baby chicks need to be kept pretty hot. Think sauna! The first week of their lives they require an air temperature of **95 degrees**, the second week 90 degrees, and so on - going down by 5 degrees per week until they're ready to transition to "outside." (Adopters will do that part.)

How will you know the temp is right? The chicks will not stay crammed together directly under the light ALL the time (alho they do snuggle together a LOT at first!). They will venture out for food and water, moving back to snuggle together and sleep. If it's too cold they will pile up desperately under the light and not move away from it to eat or drink. If it's too hot in the bin, you'll find your chicks peeping loudly, all pressed into the corner farthest from the bulb. Adjust heat in the bin by tipping the light more or less directly down, or by arranging the cover to keep in or vent out a bit of heat. You could raise or lower the light (not so far the chicks touch it) from its normal clamped location--McGyver skills here! Once the weather warms and the chicks get bigger, the perfect temp won't be as critical as it is the first week or two. You'll find the sweet spot and they will give you signals.

**WATER** Your chicks will need fresh water all the time, and that will mean filling their waterer two or better three times a day, depending on how many chicks you have using one waterer. (Don't use a dish for a waterer—little chicks can drown.) Chicks are messy---you will never find the water in the bottom dish clean. They will survive some nasty water fine, but clean water twice a day will give them a good start. After the chicks are a little bigger, placing the waterer about an inch up on some sort of base like a wood block will keep some bedding out of the water.

**FOOD** "Chick starter" food is sold in "crumbles" that they can get down, and it's high in protein. Chicks drop a lot, and poop on it! Your feeder will need filling twice a day probably. Some of that floor stuff will get eaten if food gets low. **Tip:** Get to know how your feeder is put together, to avoid spills. Its base is in two parts that twist apart for cleaning (in addition to the jar part twisting off the base for filling with food). You can TAPE the base's two parts together if you don't trust yourself to be thinking well in the early AM or late PM.

**About the floor**—Don't obsess. Their bedding is there to absorb some of their waste. You throw the waste out with the bedding when you change it. Chicks can live well on layered newspaper sheets, swapped out for more papers when they get wet and nasty. But if you don't have that much newsprint around, you can also use FINE PINE SHAVINGS sold in "bales" at Tractor Supply and feed stores. The chicks will try to eat them a bit, but they also learn to scratch for their food. Do not use cedar shavings as cedar will poison chicks!