



Keeping Chicks Healthy

Note: *This article is not intended to take the place of veterinarian advice. If you are concerned about your chick's health, consult with a veterinarian (for emergencies, keep your veterinarian's phone number on speed dial.)*

The term "mother hen" is used to describe doting caretakers for good reason: real-life hens make the absolute best mothers. They know instinctively how to take good care of their babies.

If you want to raise baby chicks without a hen—ones you purchased at a feed store or through a hatchery—you'll need to provide the same kind of motherly care.

Here are four ways to "mother hen" new chicks to help ensure they are less susceptible to illness and grow up healthy.

1. Heat. One of the most important factors in keeping a baby chick healthy is heat. Adult chickens have a body temperature of 105 to 107 degrees Fahrenheit, and chicks naturally huddle under their mothers to keep warm. Newly hatched chicks without this option need a heat lamp in their enclosure that will keep the floor area around 90 to 95 degrees. Keep a thermometer on the bottom of the cage so you can monitor the temperature. At 4 weeks of age, you can gradually start reducing the temperature by 5 degrees each week to help chicks get acclimated to their upcoming life outdoors.

2. Food. The right diet is crucial if you want to keep your baby chicks healthy. Young chicks need starter food made especially for them. This food—known as "crumble" or "mash"—comes in tiny pieces that are easy for chicks to pick up and swallow. Starter food also contains the necessary nutrients young chicks need to grow. (Avoid giving chicks food that

is designed for adult chickens since these diets contain more calcium than a baby chick can handle.) Keep starter food available at all times and be sure to use a feeder designed specifically for baby chicks.



3. Water. Cool, clean, freshwater is essential for chicks' growth and survival. Use a water dispenser made for chicks and place it away from the heat source to ensure the water remains cool. Change the water once or twice daily, or as often as necessary to keep it clean since chicks can sometimes toss food or bedding into the dispenser.

4. Cleanliness. An important way to help protect chicks from disease is to keep their enclosure clean. It's easy for a group of chicks to quickly dirty a small pen or cage. The more waste material builds up in an enclosure, the more chance pathogenic bacteria will have to increase. It is preferable to use absorbent, dust-free bedding, like pine or aspen shavings. (Stay away from cedar shavings since the fragrance of the bark can cause respiratory distress in chicks.) Place an absorbent material, such as puppy training pads, underneath the bedding to help keep dampness to a minimum.

The first four weeks of a chick's life will require extra attention and more work, but after that, you'll find it was worth it. A solid first four weeks will give your chicks the start they need to help withstand disease and grow into strong, healthy birds.

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