

Caring for Newly Hatched Chicks

Poultry and waterfowl are tough and independent after they hatch but it is essential that basic welfare is planned and ready before eggs hatch. The following advice is general and will apply to most species of domestic poultry and waterfowl. It's mostly common sense but it is vital to make sure chicks don't suffer due to lack of planning. If you breed more exotic species then you will need to check their requirements specifically.

What to do With Newly Hatched Chicks

Don't be in a hurry to take chicks out of the incubator. Many birds, such as chickens, quail, and pheasants can survive for a couple of days in the incubator without feed or water. The chicks will have taken nourishment from the yolk of the egg before they hatched, this will sustain them until they fluff out, gain strength and become active enough to go out and find food. Ideally chicks should be taken from the incubator after 24 hours. Make sure you have a suitable brooding box or pen ready for your chicks with disposable bedding or newspaper. Chicks should not be put onto a smooth surface as this can cause splayed legs.

Keeping Chicks Warm

Chicks need to be kept warm after they have been removed from the incubator. The Brinsea EcoGlow Safety chick brooders are ideal for keeping newly hatched poultry, game and waterfowl warm. The low voltage heater panels warm chicks directly and are more economical and safer than infra-red lamps. A typical heat lamp runs at 250 watts compared with 12 watts consumption for the EcoGlow Safety 600. When you consider that the brooder is on 24/7, this is an important saving. These heaters are easily adjustable to suit the size and age of your chicks. If you are worried about whether your chicks are warm enough the best guide is their behaviour – huddled up under a heater suggests they need more warmth. Check for draughts (Brinsea's Chick Enclosure Panels are great for preventing draughts), adjust the heater height down or get a bigger heater if necessary. As chicks grow they become much more tolerant of cold conditions and adult birds need no supplementary heating at all.



Feeding Baby Chicks

As soon as your chicks have been moved from the incubator make sure that they have access to water and food to avoid starvation and dehydration. Food and water should be available at all times. Using a specially prepared chick crumb takes the worry out of feeding chicks as it is specially made to provide young chicks with all of the nutrients they need for growing. Make sure that you use a specially designed drinker to avoid the risk of chicks drowning or catching a chill by falling into water. If you do not have a drinker use a shallow water dish with marbles or clean pebbles set in the water - the chicks will drink in the spaces between the marbles/pebbles. Do not let feed or water run out!

Cleaning Your Incubator

After hatching clean your incubator thoroughly. As incubators are warm and wet they are ideal breeding grounds for bacteria and if they have been left with debris from the last hatch of last year they will harbour germs which are highly likely to damage your next hatch. Use Brinsea Incubation Disinfectant which is both powerful and safe and has been specially formulated to kill bacteria and fungi associated with birds and is available online from www.brinsea.co.uk. Rinse off the disinfectant and leave the incubator parts to dry thoroughly. If they are properly clean they should no longer have a strong odour.

Housing

Young chicks are extremely vulnerable to predators. They can be taken by rats, crows, cats, foxes, mink, etc. If they are in a barn then make sure rats can't get to them and if they are outside (in warmer weather) check that they are protected from above by netting as well as from the sides. At night rats and foxes will dig to get to birds so their night shelter must prevent this too. Foxes are the main threat to adult birds and good quality housing and ensuring the birds are secure at dusk each day is essential to minimise the risk.