

GROWING BABY CHICKS: WEEK 1

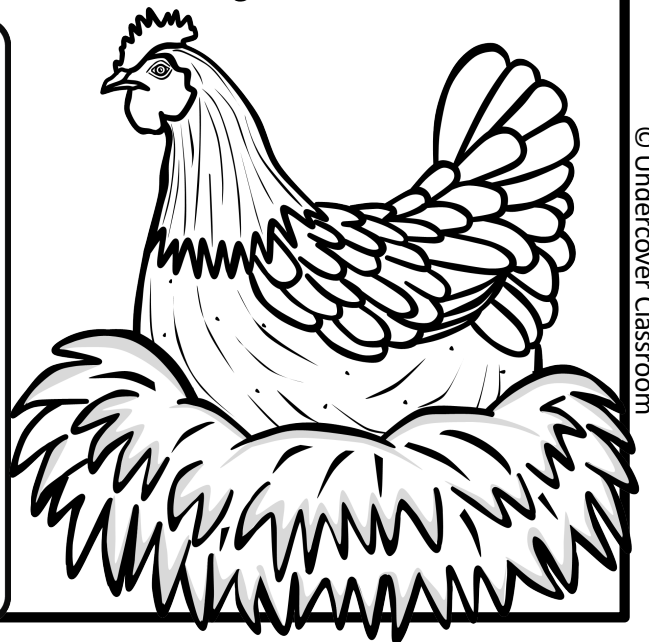
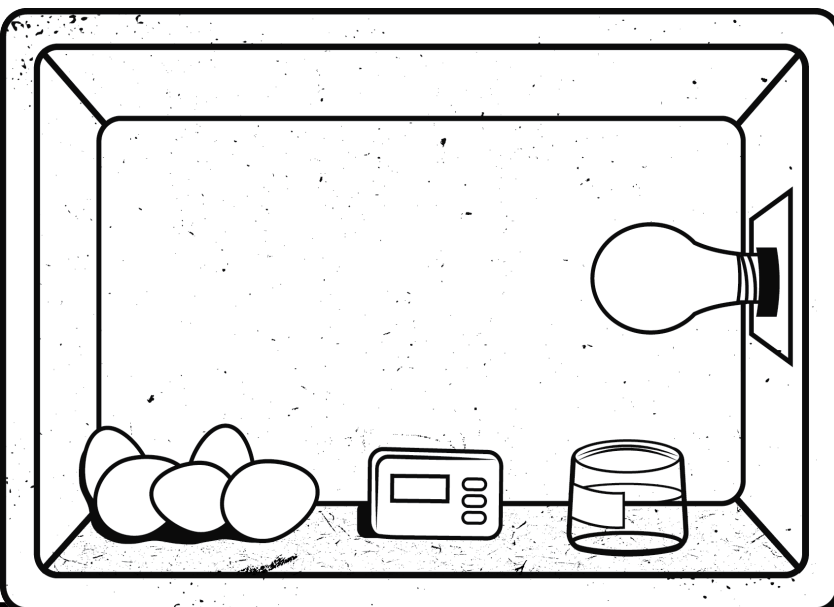
What is Chicken Egg Incubation?

When a mother hen lays eggs, she sits on top of them, turns them, and keeps them warm until they hatch. The hen only leaves her eggs for short times to eat. However, not all hens are good mothers. For this reason, most chicken farmers **incubate** eggs. This means that they take care of the eggs instead of the hens.

How does **incubation** work? Farmers use a special tool called an **incubator**. This machine acts like the mother hen. It warms the area around the eggs. The farmers also have to turn the eggs. Sometimes the incubating machine turns the eggs. If the eggs are well cared for, most of them will hatch into chicks.

To get started, the farmer collects **fertilized** eggs from the hens. Not all eggs are fertilized. A fertilized egg has an embryo inside that is capable of growing into a chick if it is cared for properly. Most hens lay one egg each day. After collecting the eggs, the farmer puts them in an incubator. Usually, it takes about 21 days for the eggs to hatch.

There are three important parts of the egg. The **yolk sac** is the food for the growing chick. The **albumen** is the white of the egg. There is also an **air cell** located at the large end of the egg. The egg has everything the baby chick needs to grow.



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What is Chicken Egg Incubation? (continued)

During the first week, lots of changes take place in the egg. Starting as tiny **cells**, the chick begins to grow. First, the brain and eyes form. Then, on around day 2, the heart begins beating. Soon, the wings, beak, legs, and tongue form. However, if you could peek into the shell, you'd just see a blob. Yet, the chick, or **embryo**, is working hard to grow. By the end of the first week, the chick can begin to move a little.

At this point, many farmers **candle** their eggs. That means they hold the egg up to a bright light in a dark room. This way, they can see some of what's inside the eggs. When doing this, farmers look for veins. This shows that the embryos are growing. Another important thing farmers look for is the air cell. They look for an empty space at one end of the egg.

During the first week of incubation, the baby chick grows all of its organs. In just a short time, a few cells turn into a living being. In a few weeks, a chick will hatch!

