

# The story so far...

Hens lay eggs almost every day. But for chickens to grow, the hen must first be mated with a rooster. The eggs she then lays are fertile eggs. You don't buy these eggs in the supermarket. We don't normally eat these eggs. These eggs go into our incubator.

Your eggs were collected 18 days ago and placed in an incubator. An incubator is a device which keeps eggs warm and moist while the chicks grow, just like mother hen. It takes 21 days to hatch eggs.

The eggs are turned over every morning and every night. By turning the eggs, we ensure the chick inside the shell gets the nutrients it needs from the yolk. A mother hen turns the eggs while she sits on them.

Some chicks just don't grow inside the eggs. During the last eighteen days, we have candled the eggs to see which ones have chicks and which ones don't. To candle an egg means to look at it with a torch in a dark room. You can actually see the chick move!

This morning the eggs were carefully packed into egg cartons, and kept warm in a special box until they were delivered to you ready to go into your incubator.

Your incubator is set up on a stable table near a power point. We need the power for the heating element and the fan inside the incubator to work. A thermostat ensures the temperature remains at a constant level by turning the heater on and off. We can tell how warm it is inside by looking at the thermometer. The temperature needs to stay at 37.5 degrees.

The eggs are placed on the floor of the incubator. We must be very careful not to bump the incubator. If the eggs roll too much, the chicks inside may actually drown.

In the incubator, behind the fan is a plastic container. This container is filled with water. The water in the incubator is very important. The water together with the heat creates humidity. The humidity helps keep the egg shell moist. The moisture softens the egg shell, which makes it easier for the chicks to hatch. It is very important not to open the incubator, as this will cause the humidity to drop.

The eggs are due to hatch on Wednesday. Before they hatch, if you listen carefully, you may actually be able to hear the chicks cheeping.

The eggs may rock back and forth and eventually you may notice some of the shell break away. This is called 'pipping'. The chick uses a special part on the top of its beak called the 'egg tooth' to break away the shell.

After the pipping begins... Well, you'll just have to wait and see.

What do you think the chicks will look like when they first come out of their eggs?

Have a look on the calendar to see when the eggs were collected and when they are due to hatch.