

Changing a nappy

Changing a wet nappy can be incredibly quick and easy — the work of a few seconds for an experienced hand. But, now and then, dealing with a really dirty nappy can turn into a scene of total mayhem. It's all part of the joy of motherhood...

If you're new to parenting, or expecting your first baby, it may come as a bit of a shock to realise that you'll probably be changing about six nappies a day, for up to three years. According to Cheshire County Council, the average baby gets through 5000 nappies by the age of two and a half¹.

So yes, you're going to be changing a lot of nappies. Within a few weeks of your baby being born, you'll probably be whipping out the baby wipes with barely a moment's thought. But in the first hazy, scary days of being a new mother, you may feel as if you don't have a clue.

Panic not. Our guide to nappy changing will get to the bottom of what you need to know.

Buying nappies

- Nappies come in a range of sizes to suit your growing baby, with leading brands offering nappies in the smallest size for newborns from 4 to 11lbs (2 to 5kg) in weight.
- Most supermarkets also offer their own brand ranges of nappies as well as more environmentally friendly brands and own-brand ranges. These are often cheaper, but also perform well. The right choice is purely down to personal preference.
- A huge choice of nappies is available. Each brand offers various different nappy products, each promising different benefits such as protection for sleep time, a secure fit for new babies or greater stretch for active babies.

Choosing a disposable nappy

If you're sleep deprived and feeling less than lively, you may find yourself swaying in front of the nappy range unable to decide whether you want a 'natural fit' or 'secure fit'. In reality, the differences are not that great and any nappy will do the job, as long as it's changed regularly.

You may be tempted to plan ahead and buy in bulk in response to special offers before your baby is born. But before you get carried away, consider where you're going to store all those big nappy packets.

Don't forget that your baby may grow much more rapidly than you had expected, leaving you with lots of newborn nappies that no longer protect against leaks effectively. To be on the safe side, buy as you go, so you can make sure you're buying the right size and fit for your baby's development.

Choosing a reusable nappy

If you've decided against using disposable nappies for environmental or cost reasons, you'll find an even bigger and more bewildering range of cloth nappies available.

To confuse you even further, they also sometimes referred to washable or reusable nappies, real nappies, cotton nappies etc. Essentially there are two main choices of nappy and liner available:

Two-part nappies

- Most nappies are in two parts – an absorbent nappy and a breathable, waterproof cover known as a wrap
- Two-part nappies can be flat (like old fashioned terry-towelling nappies) or shaped with elastic at the legs for a snugger fit
- Outer wraps are available in wealth of bright and funky designs
- Nappies can be used with (or come with) a variety of fixings to get a snug fit, such as poppers, Velcro or plastic grips.

All-in-one nappies

- You can also choose an all-in-one nappy with an integral waterproof wrap
- These are shaped to fit your baby (more like a disposable)
- Most designs fasten with either Velcro or poppers
- However all-in-one nappies take longer to dry and are more expensive than other nappy types.

Liners

- Both two-part and all-in-one nappies should be used in conjunction with an inner liner
- Two types of liner are available: washable or a biodegradable, flushable liner
- Washable fleece liners feel soft next to the skin and dry very quickly
- They also act as a one way barrier, to keep your baby's skin drier

- Flushable paper liners have the advantage that they can simply be flushed down the toilet, so you needn't deal with washing out the poo
- A booster pad can also be used either inside the nappy, or between the nappy and the wrap, to soak up wee — useful at night time or for an older baby.

Tips for living with reusable nappies

- Reusable nappies should be washed at 60°C
- Waterproof wraps should be washed separately, following the manufacturer's instructions
- If you simply can't face the extra laundry load every day, local nappy laundries are also available offering weekly services that collect used nappies and provide a freshly laundered supply
- Many reusable nappy providers offer a nappy system trial pack, so you can see whether reusable nappies works for you, before investing in a full range of nappies
- Once you're confident that you'll be using reusable nappies, you can then buy a 'birth to potty' pack with all the different sizes of nappies and wraps to take your baby up to toddlerhood.

What you need to change a nappy

When you become a new parent, you're bombarded with sales messages to buy huge amounts of equipment like expensive changing stations and designer changing bags. But in reality, much of it is 'nice to have' rather than 'must have'.

To change a nappy, all you really need is:

Changing mat — one with a towelling mat is cosier against a bare bottom. It's also well worth having a travel changing mat for when you're out and about. Not everywhere has a baby changing room, so there will undoubtedly be times when you have to improvise about where you change your baby's nappy.

Cotton wool balls — when your baby is newborn, your health visitor will advise you to use only cotton wool balls and warm water on their delicate skin. Unless your baby's skin is particularly delicate, you'll probably move on fairly swiftly to...

Baby wipes — a huge choice is available, including baby wipes that are fragrance and alcohol free. If your baby gets a sore bottom, these are probably the gentlest to use.

Nappy rash ointment — a large tube is invaluable and will last for a long time.

Nappies — it's always worth having two or three with you at all times, as babies can surprise you with a series of dirty nappies in quick succession.

Nappy bags — they may be highly scented and lurid coloured, but nappy bags are lifesavers when you've got a full and leaking nappy on your hands (especially when you're not near a bin). Eco-friendly nappy bags are also available, if you're concerned about the use of plastic bags.

How to change a nappy

Creating a changing area

- Put your changing mat on a clean, safe surface that your baby cannot roll off
- Lay your baby face up on the changing mat

Taking a nappy off

- If your baby is already wearing a nappy, undo the side fastenings and pull down front of the nappy
- If the nappy is dirty, it may be easier to use the front of the nappy to gently scoop down any poo into the used nappy (thus minimising the need for wiping)
- If your baby is very dirty you may want to do a quick wipe using a baby wipe or cotton wool and water, before taking the nappy from underneath the bottom
- Take off the nappy and place out of reach, ready to be disposed of or laundered

Cleaning your baby

- Clean your baby's nappy area, paying attention to gently cleaning between any folds of skin
- If it has been a very dirty nappy, check that no poo has escaped up your baby's back and onto their vest

Positioning a new nappy

- Lift up your baby's feet by gently grasping two feet in one hand while you slide a clean nappy under the bottom.
- The back of the nappy (the side with the tapes on) should be underneath your baby's back
- The fold of the nappy should sit at the bottom of your baby's bottom, so that both sides are at even height on your baby's front and back.
- If you're using a reusable nappy, the widest part should be under your baby's waist
- Bring the front of the nappy up and past your baby's tummy button

Fastening the new nappy

- Before fastening the nappy, you may want to use a thin layer of nappy ointment to help prevent or treat nappy rash
- For a disposable nappy, unpeel the side tapes and bring them round to the front panel, attaching each tape fairly evenly at each side to ensure a snug fit
- If you're using a reusable nappy, use the Velcro, poppers or plastic grips to secure the nappy
- Your job is done.

Sources

1. <http://www.cheshire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/496504B9-9E22-4D3F-956F-D06A78800DC4/0/RealNappyLeaflet.pdf>

A wide range of women's health resources are available at www.healthywomen.org.uk

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