



# real nappies



## what are they?

They're washable nappies made from cotton or other natural materials. They're reusable, unlike disposable nappies, which are thrown away after use. There are different makes, styles, patterns and colours, and they usually come with a waterproof outer and sometimes liners to catch solids - either fabric and washable or paper and flushable. The main types are:

- terry squares - the simplest type. The traditional nappy, folded and pinned (or you can use a plastic 'Nappy Nippa'-type fastener). Used with a removable waterproof outer, they are by far the cheapest option, and the easiest to dry
- prefold - cotton rectangles folded to size and placed inside a cover; another cheap option;
- pocket or stuffed nappies - the 'pocket' comprises waterproof outer and absorbent



*Basic terry square.*



*Inserting a prefold nappy into a cover.*

inner, between which is stuffed a washable absorbent layer; work well, bit more expensive;

- shaped - absorbent material shaped like a disposable, fixed with velcro, poppers or nappy-nippa, and used with a waterproof outer; more expensive and take longer to dry;
- all-in-ones - the same as shaped nappies, but with a fixed outer layer; possibly the simplest to use, but take the longest to dry. You'll need to get different sizes as your baby grows.

## what are the benefits?

**Cost:** no contest. The Women's Environmental Network found in 2006 that using disposables over 2.5 years costs between £600-£900, and washables (including washing) £200-£350; and in 2008 clothnappytree.com came up with c. £1600 for disposables and £400 for washables. And of course the cost benefits are greater if you use the same nappies for a subsequent child.

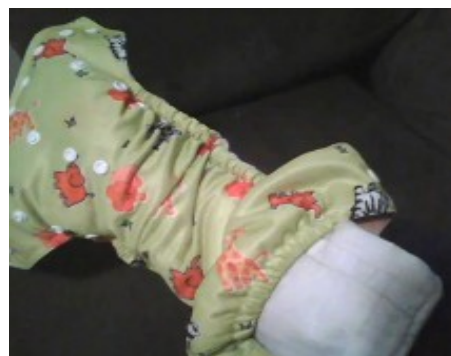
**For the child:** using real nappies avoids the nasty synthetic chemicals in disposables, like polyacrylic acid (banned from tampons due to link

with toxic shock syndrome); tributyltin (damages the immune system, disrupts sex hormones); dioxins (carcinogen); ethylbenzene (suspected respiratory toxin); styrene (suspected carcinogen); and many more. Do you really want to put this stuff next to your child's genitalia for 2 years?

And there's no evidence that disposables reduce nappy rash - it just means changing your baby more often, or you can use fleece washable nappy liners. They let urine flow through and be absorbed but they're not absorbent in themselves, so they keep it away from the baby's skin, reducing the occurrence & severity of nappy rash.

**Convenience:** well, disposables are easier - but if you're reading this you're probably not the type to put ease above ecology. People who've done it say it's not that hard once you get into a routine. And if you save time using disposables, how are you going to spend it? Using real nappies means spending time with your baby - but you'll be doing something good for your baby, for the world it's going to grow up in, and will save you money - that you can spend on your baby. A no-brainer, surely? You wouldn't throw away your underwear at the end of every day for convenience.

**Environment:** the raw materials, energy, transport and waste involved in manufacturing, distributing and dumping disposables increase what's known as throughput, which is the source of ecological problems. Also, the chemicals and



*Inserting absorbent material into a pocket nappy.*

## real nappies



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concentrated faeces from disposables in landfill leach into groundwater, which is toxic for plants and animals, including ourselves, as 35% of our drinking water comes from groundwater. There are more environmental benefits to using real nappies if they are made from organic cotton, and if they're used for a subsequent child.

An Environment Agency report in 2008 found the average carbon emissions for disposables and reusables until a child is potty trained came out at about the same – around 560kg over two-and-a-half years - but with greater scope to reduce this figure with reusables, via behavioural change. We think people who use reusables are much more likely to wash with fuller loads, not wash above 60°C, not use tumble-driers, and of course, often reusable nappies are used with more than one child. Also, the report looked at shaped nappies, which are heavier than terries (but at least this report didn't assume that reusable nappies will be ironed, as they did in a 2005 report!).

## what can I do?

It's often stressful being a new parent, so you won't necessarily be at your most receptive to new ideas! But, if you're trying for a little one, and you'd like to do it in the greenest / healthiest / cheapest way you can, here are some tips.

Find demo and trial kits locally - contact your local authority to ask what they provide, or see the Real Nappy Campaign. Babies are different so it might take you a while to see which nappy works best for you and your baby. Most real nappy providers offer tester kits and samples for first timers.

You'll need about 20 nappies, plus accessories. There are lots of places to get them from, locally or online, and see Mumsnet's reviews of reusable nappies (resources). It should cost around £100-£250 to kit yourself out, depending on which type



*Shaped nappy folded and fastened with a nappy-nippa.*



*All-in-one.*

you choose, and about £1 per week to wash them. You can save even more money by getting your nappies second hand. See resources.

They don't need soaking; rinse immediately after use, wring them out, and chuck them in a bin with a tightly-fitting lid, with a few drops of tea tree oil. Wait until you have about 10 nappies, then wash at 60°C and dry on a clothes horse or line outside. Drying space is crucial. If you don't have it, then using a tumble dryer negates any environmental benefits. There's even information out there on how to fold reusable nappies (resources).

If you want to be even more environmentally-friendly, use eco detergents, don't bother with fabric conditioner, switch to a green electricity supplier, and make sure your nappies get reused after you've finished with them.

You can use a nappy washing service - although unless very local, this will completely wipe out the cost benefits, and also the environmental benefits, due to the trucking around of soiled and clean nappies - so we can't really recommend it any more than we would recommend disposables.

## resources

- see [lowimpact.org/real\\_nappies](http://lowimpact.org/real_nappies) for more info, links, books, including:
- Danielle Pientka, *How to Sew, Clean & Use Cloth Diapers*
- Amy McKnight, *Rediscovering Hope: a Step-by-step Guide to Using Flat Cloth Diapers*
- Kelly Wels, *Changing Diapers: the Hip Mum's Guide to Modern Cloth Diapering*
- [wikihow.com/Fold-a-Cloth-Diaper](http://wikihow.com/Fold-a-Cloth-Diaper) – 4 ways to fold a cloth nappy
- [clothnappytree.com](http://clothnappytree.com) – lots of info
- [gecco.org.uk/real-nappy-campaign](http://gecco.org.uk/real-nappy-campaign) - campaign

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