



# FAMILY

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## Diapering Your Baby

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### Quick Facts...

When choosing diapers, consider baby's health, cost, convenience and the environment.

Changing and laundering are two of the most time-consuming tasks for parents.

Newborns need changing about 12 times daily — more than 5,000 diaper changes in two years.

Disposable diapers, cloth diapers and a diaper service are three approaches to diapering.

Frequent changing of wet or soiled diapers helps protect baby's skin from rashes.

Rinse soiled diapers in the toilet to remove solid waste — yes, rinse disposable diapers!

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Today's parents have many convenient features to consider with three basic diapering options: cloth diapers, diaper service and disposable diapers. You may decide to use a combination of diapering options.

Just as babies are not alike, neither are diapers. Try several kinds to see what works best. The choice may depend on your budget and where you live. Can you afford disposable diapers? Do you have the time and energy to launder cloth diapers? Do you have a local diaper service? Is water a problem in your area? Will disposable diapers impose a strain on your local landfill?

Your baby's health is most important. Keep in mind your baby's comfort, then consider convenience, cost and environmental waste.

### Diaper Rash

Diaper rash or dermatitis varies from a mild redness to painful open sores on the abdomen, buttocks and genitals and within the folds of the thighs. Too much moisture, chaffing, prolonged contact with urine and feces, and the soap used to wash diapers can all cause diaper rash. Even an allergic reaction to diaper material may cause a rash.

The skin's protective layers break down when they are exposed to too much water. Excessive water removes protective skin oils and makes the skin vulnerable to chaffing, cracking and infection.

More than 60 percent of babies between four and 15 months old get diaper rash at least once in a two-month period. Diaper rash occurs more often as infants get older. It peaks at age eight to 10 months.

Pediatricians link diaper rash to babies who:

- are not kept clean and dry;
- have frequent bowel movements, especially when the stools remain in diapers overnight;
- are beginning to eat table food; or
- are taking antibiotics.

Mild cases usually clear up in three to four days. Good ointments are available that counteract the ammonia in urine and also kill bacteria on the skin. Severe cases require medical attention.

### Changing Diapers

Your baby's skin is delicate. To change a diaper and reduce the chance of diaper rash:

Change wet or soiled diapers promptly to reduce exposure to urine and stool. For a newborn, check cloth diapers as often as every hour.

Place the baby on a clean towel and remove the wet diaper. Gently cleanse the diaper area, from front to back, with warm water and a soft wash

cloth. Blot dry or air dry if possible. If the baby has had a bowel movement, fold the soiled portion of the diaper under and wipe the buttocks with toilet tissue. Wash the buttocks with mild soap and water, rinse, and pat or air dry. Also, a warm, shallow bath without soap or with 1/2 teaspoon of baking soda can clean the baby's bottom.

Avoid excessive cleaning with harsh soap or diaper wipes that contain alcohol. This can dry and irritate the skin.

A baby's skin can do just as well without baby powder and other skin products — they may increase skin irritation. Pediatricians recommend against talcum or baby powder because babies can breathe in particles. Do not let the baby play with the powder container. Avoid creating a dust of powder that the baby can inhale.

Hold the baby's ankles between your thumb and middle finger with your index finger between the ankles. Raise the hips and slide a clean diaper underneath. Pull the diaper between the baby's legs and fasten it.

You may allow the baby to go without diapers a few hours each day until the rash subsides.

## Disposable Diapers

Prices can range from \$.12 to \$.32 each depending upon features, brand name vs. store brand, and type of store you shop. Special sales, quantity packs, and coupons and grocery store "club" cards can make a big difference in total savings. You might be able to locate a diaper wholesaler in your area and purchase by the case. Buy the least expensive brand that performs for you and the baby.

### Features

Disposable diapers come in many sizes. Use the correct size for your baby. Consider weight and body and leg thickness for better comfort and better leak protection. There is also an adjustable one-size-fits-all diaper. Different brands and special features will vary the sizes and weights.

Disposable diapers have a waterproof outer lining and an absorbent middle lining that holds wetness. They come in regular and super-absorbent types. Super-absorbent diapers are thinner and have a core that quickly absorbs and holds moisture. They are better at preventing skin wetness, a primary cause of diaper rash. Protective liners keep moisture away and do not release it back onto the skin. Disposable diapers are convenient, especially for travel.

Many features, such as contoured shape, elastic waistband and elastic legs, promote comfort and fit. You can save money by purchasing diapers with only the features needed to keep your baby dry and clean.

### Environmental and Health Issues

There is always a concern about environmental and health issues associated with disposable diapers. The plastic cover on these diapers makes them nonbiodegradable and can strain landfills. Research has improved their ability to decompose, and more is being done. New technologies will incorporate antimicrobial and odor-control properties while improving degradability.

An additional health hazard arises from fecal material that ends up in landfills instead of being filtered through sewage treatment plants. Because intestinal viruses are excreted in feces, this represents a threat to sanitation workers and ground water supplies. You as a consumer can contribute to a healthy environment if you rinse feces into the toilet before you throw disposable diapers away. Never flush disposable diapers down a toilet.

### **Disposable Diaper Features:**

- Absorbent core
- Adjustable tape fasteners
- Aloe liners
- Antibacterial properties in liners
- Breathable covers with microvents
- Colorful cartoon characters
- Contour fit
- Custom "fold-n-tuck"
- Elastic waistbands contain leakage
- Notch for umbilical cord protection
- Soft stretch
- Taller leg guards or wide elastic leg bands
- Trim fit or ultra-thin for less bulk
- Unisex or specific padding designed for boys or girls
- Various absorbency depending upon use, e.g., nighttime

### **Disposable Diaper Sizes:**

- Newborn = 6-10 lbs
- Size 1, Small = 8-14 lbs
- Size 2, Small/medium = 12-18 lbs
- Size 3, Medium = 16-38 lbs
- Size 4, Large = 22-37 lbs
- Size 5, Extra large = 30+ lbs
- Size 6, Extra extra large = 35+ lbs
- Training pants or "pull-ups" for toddlers = 30-80 lbs

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*Never flush disposable diapers down a toilet!*

**Cloth Diaper Features:**

- Adjustable gathered leg openings
- Buckle closure (child proof)
- Colors, prints
- Contour design
- Leg gussets (double)
- Organic: unbleached, undyed, untreated
- Prefolded; absorbent centers
- Velcro closures with protective covers

## Cloth Diapers

Prices can range from \$9 to \$25 per dozen, depending upon the features, brands and type of store you shop. Fitted, contoured diapers with snaps or Velcro closures or organic cotton may range from \$60 to \$100 a dozen. You will need between four and six dozen cloth diapers.

Invest in quality diaper pins and diaper wraps, covers or waterproof pants. Flushable, stay-dry liners provide more absorbency and convenience. Patterns are available for sewing your own fitted diapers and diaper covers. This can save money if you know how to sew.

Reusable cloth diapers are more economical and they reduce the cost of diapering a second child. New parents need flat cloth diapers to use as burp cloths, lap towels, changing pads and utility cloths. Cloth diapers do not contribute to the overburdening of landfills and do not deplete wood resources. However, home laundering costs include detergent, water, electricity and depreciation costs of washer and dryer (average in 1999 = \$.04 per diaper).

### Features

Cloth diapers come in a variety of fabrics and even styles that resemble disposable diapers. Fabrics include cotton gauze, bird's-eye, flannelette and terry. Gauze diapers usually are softer, more absorbent and lighter than the other fabrics. Gauze is the most comfortable of the three fabrics. Its porousness allows air to circulate, which helps prevent diaper rash. Bird's-eye diapers are slightly more durable and less expensive than gauze. Flannelette is less absorbent but warmer. Terry is more absorbent than gauze or bird's-eye fabrics but may keep the skin wetter unless changed frequently.

Styles include flat, prefolded, and fitted or contour diapers. Flat diapers are the least expensive and most time-consuming to use. They come in squares, rectangles or stretch rectangles that can be folded in various ways as the baby grows.

Diaper liners add convenience and ease and help avoid stained diapers. Diaper "doublers" are strips of absorbent material that you put inside the diaper. Liners and doublers are a convenience and may be worth the cost.

If you use diaper pins, keep your finger between the pin and the baby to avoid pricking the baby's skin. Dispose of dull pins or ones with broken plastic heads. Stick the pointed end of the pin in a bar of soap to help it slide more easily through the cloth.

New designs in cloth diapers have gathered legs, require no folding, and use no pins. Prefolded diapers may have up to six layers of thickness down the middle. Fitted or contour diapers have an hour-glass shape, require no pins, and come in several sizes. They are convenient but more expensive. Prefolded diapers may take a long time to dry. Look for ones with a fast-drying design. Instead of pins, fitted cloth diapers may have Velcro tabs with covers to prevent snags in the wash. Diaper wraps also require no pins.

Also consider waterproof pants. Pull-on or snap-on styles are easy to use and keep outer clothing and bedding dry. Diaper wraps or covers use snaps and Velcro closures so diaper pins aren't needed. Both come in a variety of colors and print designs.

### Laundering Cloth Diapers

Proper laundering of cloth diapers is critical. If diapers are not well rinsed, soap residue can remain and cause ammonia buildup and diaper rash.

1. Dunk soiled diapers up and down in the toilet as you flush to remove feces. You do not need to rinse diapers that are just wet.
2. Place the diaper in a covered diaper pail that contains 1 teaspoon of

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*Adapted from: Choosing diapers for your baby: Cloth or disposables. (1990). University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension.*

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borax to 1 gallon of water. You may also use 1/4 cup baking soda or vinegar. Soak until you are ready to wash. Keep toddlers away from this pail.

3. Wash the diapers by themselves. Use a mild soap or detergent and wash the diapers on the hottest cycle. Avoid detergents that contain bleach or fabric softeners. Fabric softener decreases absorbency. Use a water conditioner if you have hard water. When your baby is older and the skin less sensitive, you can experiment with detergents and bleach.
4. Rinse twice to remove all soap residue. Add 1/4 cup of white vinegar to the final rinse if you suspect an ammonia buildup. Rinse three times if your water is hard.
5. If possible, dry diapers in the sun. Sunlight destroys many bacteria and restores whiteness. Also, it uses less energy than machine drying, as long as you have time to hang the diapers on the line. To avoid shrinkage and make them last longer, air dry diaper covers.

## Diaper Service

Using a diaper service for the first several months could be a great convenience to new parents. The cost averages \$13 to \$15 per week depending on the service and how many diapers you order. If you have more than one child in diapers, the cost drops 50 to 75 percent for additional diapers for a second child. Diapers are picked up and delivered to your door each week. Most services supply hamper, pails and liners. There is no soaking or laundry involved. State-of-the-art technology cleans and sanitizes diapers. Some services also deliver disposable diapers.

A rust-proof diaper pail with a tight-fitting lid is needed to store soiled diapers. Diaper pails may use standard trash bags for easy use with disposable diapers, have handy features including a tight lid cover with locking system, foot-operated pedal, airlock, and child-resistant deodorizer compartment.

Diaper care takes your time and energy but it is also a special time to be with your baby — to play and interact. For additional references, refer to sites on the World Wide Web that cover baby care and parenting. You may want to see if you can purchase diapers on-line. Weigh shipping charges against your driving costs and time to purchase them locally.

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