

A Guide to Using Real Nappies

Modern real nappies are very practical, easy to use and wash and offer parents an alternative to disposable nappies.

Real nappies usually consist of a liner, a nappy and a waterproof cover that work together to provide maximum comfort, reliability and efficiency. A wide range of nappy systems are available from simple cotton squares to shaped nappies fastened with Velcro or poppers for greater convenience.

This guide is an introduction to:

- different nappy systems
- different material types
- how to look after your nappies
- the cost of using real nappies
- what you will need to get started



Types of Nappy Systems

Sized Shaped Nappies

Shaped nappies are available in two main sizes. Size 1 is usually from birth to between 16 to 20lbs (depending on the make of the nappy) then size 2 up until potty training at around 35lbs. They require a separate waterproof nappy wrap that goes over the top and therefore referred to as a **two part system**.



Advantages

A sized nappy offers a really good fit and therefore looks neater on your baby and with the waterproof wrap over the top, is very unlikely to leak. Some shaped nappies can be ordered so that they have the fastening you prefer i.e, poppers, Velcro or nappy nippa (see under 'Flat Nappies' for description).

Disadvantages

You will need two sets of nappies as your baby grows and therefore they may cost more than other types of real nappies. However, a number of sized shaped nappies are available second hand so cost savings can be made.

Birth-to-Potty Nappies

Birth-to-potty nappies, or one-size nappies, allow you to adjust the size of the nappy using a series of poppers to fit your growing baby. Some makes require a separate waterproof nappy wrap over the top whereas others have the waterproof layer built in.

Advantages

The main advantage is that you probably only need to buy one set, which should last from birth until your baby has been potty trained.

Disadvantages

The down side to this is that the fit may be compromised at the lowest and highest ends of the weight range - they will be too big for some newborns and some bigger toddlers will grow out of the nappies before they potty train.



Flat Nappies

These are the most basic of cloth nappies (the original good old Terry square!) and can be folded in a variety of ways to fit any size of baby. They also require a waterproof nappy wrap over the top.

Advantages

Flat nappies can be bought in different sizes but many parents use the 60cm by 60cm size and adjust the type of fold to fit the baby. They are also available in bamboo. They are very cost effective and quick drying and fastened by a wonderful wee gadget called a **nappy nippa**. These have tiny teeth that catch on the material and are really easy to use, no more old safety pins. However they are very sharp so don't let babies anywhere near them (apart from their nappy obviously!)

Disadvantages

The folding can put people off and flat nappies do not have elastic around the legs and back, which may result in less reliable containment.



All-In-One Nappies

As the name implies, these are a nappy that has a waterproof cover, absorbent liner and insert built in. No extra waterproof nappy wrap is required.

Advantages

Convenient and easy to use. The closest thing to a disposable with the only difference being they are washed and used again. Most come with a choice of either poppers or Velcro fastening and come in a range of style, colours and patterns.



Disadvantages

The waterproof layer is attached to the nappy so it means that each time you wash the nappy you are washing the waterproof layer. Manufacturers guarantee these nappies for one year so if you are planning to use these nappies on two or three children there may be issues around wear and tear. For very young babies on a diet of milk with very runny poo, these nappies only offer one layer of defence therefore there may be some issues around leakage, particularly around the legs. They are a bit more expensive retailing around £15 each.

Pocket Nappies

These are nappies that have waterproof covers with a pouch (pocket) into which you can place an insert. Inserts can be made of either absorbent, quick drying microfibre or super absorbent bamboo depending on how absorbent you require the nappy to be. Most are sold with microfibre inserts. No extra waterproof nappy wrap is required.

Advantages

Convenient and easy to use but because the pocket nappy allows you to separate the absorbent insert it enables it to dry that bit quicker.

Disadvantages

Same as the All-In-One.

All-In-Two Nappies

Designed so that the outer shell can be used for multiple nappy changes. Pads inside the outer shell can be removed, so if the pad is wet simply snap in a fresh one. If the shell is wet allow it to air dry and use on the next nappy change. If it is soiled then you would wash like an All-in-One. Some makes come with disposable inserts which are a hybrid of a real nappy and a disposable nappy so some people use them to take on holiday etc. No extra waterproof nappy wrap is required.

Advantages

Same as All-in-One nappy but needs less washing.

Disadvantages

Some parents talk about leakage from the booster pads onto the outer protective wrap so they end up washing the whole nappy like an All-in-One, quite frequently. Some inserts are described as 'bio compostable'. This does not mean they can be home composted as there are issues with the volume of pads that would be generated.

Nappy Wraps

These are waterproof or water resistant covers that go over a separate absorbent nappy to keep clothing dry and clean. They can be made of three fabrics: polyurethane laminate, fleece and wool.



The most popular fabric for nappy wraps is polyester bonded to a urethane laminate, PUL for short. This provides a waterproof barrier but remains soft to the touch. Wraps fasten over the nappy with Velcro or poppers and come in sized or birth-to-potty systems. Unless they are soiled, wraps do not need to be washed at each nappy change and can just be left to air.

Polyester fleece can also be used to make wraps. These are breathable allowing excellent air exchange through the fabric, and enabling some of the wetness is able to evaporate (but they are not waterproof). This helps to keep the nappy area cool and dryer, making them ideal for babies with sensitive skin or for night nappies. For a really natural choice wool wraps are breathable and water resistant.



Real Nappy Materials

Bamboo

Advantages

Very soft, stays soft after lots of washes, slim material so neat fitting on baby. It has a lower impact on the environment as it is fast growing and because it is a type of grass it can be continually harvested. Thanks to its natural ability to resist pests, bamboo needs less chemical treatment in comparison to cotton. Bamboo fabric is strong, durable, soft and very absorbent.

Disadvantages

In a home with no central heating on, bamboo nappies can take up to 36 hours to dry. However, they dry much faster on a washing line in the summer and in the winter if you have the central heating on.

Cotton

Advantages

Strong, durable, absorbent, soft and relatively quick to dry, making it ideal for nappies. Organic and/or unbleached cotton doesn't have such a harsh impact on the environment as 'regular' cotton because fewer chemicals are used in farming and manufacture. Mid-range absorbency and drying time.

Disadvantages

Cotton can go a bit hard over long term use if not using a tumble dryer, however if you kneed nappies after they have dried, this keeps them soft.

Microfibre

A man-made fabric mainly made from polyesters, tough but very soft to the touch. Some manufacturers also use a microfibre material called **minky** which has a smoother 'pile'. This looks and feels silky and is more absorbent than normal microfibre.

Advantages

Extremely good at wicking away moisture from the skin therefore great for nappies and particularly booster pads and reusable liners. Also if drying your nappies is an issue or you're in a hurry, microfibre is fantastic - it will be almost dry after a spin cycle in your washing machine.

Disadvantages

Less absorbent. Parents talk about it being like a sponge once it is wet so needs changed quite quickly once the nappy becomes wet.

Some manufacturers are now mixing the fabrics to get the best out of them so for example bamboo and microfibre are being mixed to produce an absorbent but faster drying nappy.

Linners

Linners are used to catch solid waste and are placed inside the nappy. The linner allows the wetness to pass through, so the nappy can absorb it which keeps the baby's bottom dryer.

There are two types of linners:

Flushable linners: These are made of thin paper almost like toilet paper and can be flushed down the toilet (if stated by the manufacturer) or put into your bin. If they have not been soiled they can be washed in the machine and reused several times.

Reusable fleece linners: Fleece linners are made from microfibre and are very good at wicking the moisture away from the baby's skin. They are reusable so when they are soiled they can be sluiced down the toilet before being machine washed with your nappies. You can buy these ready made or make them yourself by cutting up a piece of fleece.

Boosters

These can come in a variety of materials and are designed to add extra absorbency to your nappy. They are especially useful for overnight use or for babies that are heavy wetters.

How to Look After Your Nappies

Please follow the manufacturer's guidelines when it comes to washing your nappies. If your nappies are new then wash them several times before you use them to ensure you build up their absorbency.

Once the nappies have been worn and are wet or soiled, store them in a lidded bucket without water or soaking solution (this is called dry-paling).

When you have enough for a full load of washing pop them into the washing machine with a small amount of detergent and NO softener (softeners coat the fibres and make them less absorbent). Some people like to do a rinse cycle in their washing machine before they wash their nappies but this is not always necessary. Manufacturers usually recommend a 60°C wash although nappies can be washed at 40°C.

Line drying will help the softness of your nappies and to reduce your environmental impact try and avoid using a tumble dryer.

The Cost of Using Real Nappies

Real nappies come in a range of prices. Approximately £2 for a flat cotton nappy, £3 for a good quality second hand nappy, £9 for a shaped nappy, £9 for a waterproof nappy wrap, £15 for an All-in-One.

Costs for what you would need to get started can range from approx £50 to £300 depending on whether you go down the second hand / flat nappy route or brand new All-in-Ones/Twos.

Here at the Real Nappy Project we wouldn't recommend that you go out and buy a whole system of one particular sort of nappy if you have never tried that nappy before.

Many people are also given second hand nappies from a friend or get them for free from Freegle, Freecycle or Edinburgh Gumtree.

The Real Nappy Project sells good quality second hand nappies on the last Thursday of the month at our Duncan Place Nappuccino, Duncan Place Resource Centre, EH6 8HW, from 10am - 11.30am, with all proceeds going back into the project.

What You Need to get Started

If you are going to use real nappies most of the time you will need:

- Around 20 nappies – however this depends on how often you are going to wash them. New babies generally need 6 to 8 nappy changes daily, while fewer changes are needed as babies get older.
- Around 4 wraps if you are going to use the **two part system**
- Liners – flushable liners are available on a perforated roll of 200 or about 25 washable fleece liners
- Booster pads for extra absorbency - about 8
- A lidded bucket for storing soiled nappies
- A nappy wet bag for used nappies when you are out and about



Contacts

The Real Nappy Project at Changeworks can give you expert advice on using real nappies and has trial packs and lending kits available to introduce you to real nappies. If you would like any further information then please contact us:

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