

## Introduction to cloth nappies

Cloth nappies (also called real nappies, reusable nappies, and washable nappies) are a convenient (yes we said convenient) way to nappy your baby and do something fantastic for the environment plus save yourself lots of money. Many modern cloth nappies are shaped like disposable nappies, fastening with velcro or poppers, making them just as easy to put on your baby. They also come in a range of colours and attractive prints, so look good on. And they're much easier to wash and care for than you might expect – no soaking, scrubbing or having to get too familiar with the dirty nappy, just pop them in a bucket and wash every few days, dry and they're ready to go again! There are a variety of types to suit everyone, from an absorbent nappy part with a waterproof outer on top, to all-in-ones that are the whole package ready to go. You can also mix and match styles and brands to get the best fit and absorbency – anything can work, just give it a try.

So how about it? Give them a go and you'll be pleasantly surprised.

We hope this guide will help you start using your cloth nappies and help answer any questions you might have.

### Cloth nappy types

**All-in-ones** are a waterproof outer layer sewn to an absorbent inner to form the nappy and they look a lot like disposable nappies. They are very quick to put on, but can take a little while to dry from being washed



**All-in-twos** (also called snap-in-ones) are a cloth lined waterproof outer layer with absorbent inner layers which "snap in" with press studs. They can be taken apart for laundering, so they dry faster than all-in-ones



**Pocket nappies** are a waterproof outer layer sewn together with a soft inner lining. Between these two layers there's a pocket into which you put absorbent inserts. These are removed for washing then replaced, which can be a bit fiddly but on the plus side they dry quickly and you can add as many inserts as your baby needs



**Two part nappies** are an absorbent nappy part, with a separate waterproof wrap worn on top. They take a little more time to put as each part is put on separately, but you can mix and match to get the best fit and leak-free nappy for your baby. There are prefolds - folded cloth held together with a 'nappy nipper' or safety pin (see bear on the left) - or a shaped nappy with velcro fasteners (see bear on the right). They are great for overnight, as you can fit a lot of absorbent nappy under the waterproof wrap (wrap not shown in the photos – they fasten with velcro or poppers).



## What size?

Cloth nappies are available in fixed sizes (usually small, medium or large), or a birth to potty, which has extra fastenings at the front for adjusting the nappy size as your baby grows. Most nappies will state the size on the label, but just try them on and see how they fit (see the section checklist on fit below for more information). Newborn nappies are usually needed even if you have the birth to potty size, as they can still be too big. The Baby Bank have some newborn nappies if you need those.

## What are they made of?

The type of fabric used affects drying time. Natural fibres usually take longer to dry than synthetics, but are more absorbent. You'll want to make sure you have enough nappies to get through a few days of wet weather if you don't use a tumble drier.

You can use paper or fabric nappy liners in the nappy to make your laundry life easier by keeping solids off the nappy.

The absorbent materials in nappies include bamboo, cotton, hemp or fleece,

The waterproof outer layer is usually a breathable polyurethane laminated fabric (PUL) or there are lanolised wool covers.

## What about using nappy creams?

Some nappy creams for baby's skin will affect the absorbency of the cloth nappy (the cream sticks the fibres of the cloth together so there's less room for the liquid). So either use a liner to keep the cream away from the nappy, or use creams which melt in the wash and come off the nappies avoiding clogging the nappy. Coconut oil is popular, but there are a good few options.

## How do I know I'm using the right nappy in the right way?

Here's a checklist for a good cloth nappy and fit:

- No leaking around the legs.
- No liquid seeping through the cover.

- Not too tight or too loose around hips and legs.
- No rubbing or chafing from the nappy or fasteners around the legs or hips.
- Baby's skin feels reasonably dry when the wet nappy is removed.
- The nappy holds enough liquid to be practical (i.e. you don't have to change too often).
- Baby can move legs freely and, at later stages, crawl and walk without being bothered by the nappy.

## What about washing them?

Many parents are put off using cloth nappies when they think about washing them all and dealing with dirty nappies. Yes it's more washing than disposables, but you can do a nappy wash every other day and here's an easy five-step technique called dry pailing, which makes light work of dealing with dirty nappies:

1. Firstly, use nappy liners to catch solids – these come in flushable paper ones, or reusable fleece – then drop the solids into a toilet
2. Separate the nappy components (cover and padding) of the wet nappies, unless they're all-in-ones which don't need separating
3. Put them into a bucket with a lid – if you use a net liner in the bucket, you can lift that out into the washing machine
4. Every other day throw the load into the washing machine. First do a cold rinse cycle, then wash according to the manufacturer's instructions (usually 60 °C and a spin cycle speed not above 1200 rpm). After the cold rinse you can add other items into the washing machine if you have space.
5. Be careful not to use too much laundry detergent – one tablespoon of laundry powder per five nappies is usually about right, but you'll just need to try different amounts and see what works with your machine and water softness. And some parents add an extra rinse cycle to make sure the nappy is fully rinsed which helps the absorbency (too much laundry detergent can clog the nappy and affect the nappies absorbency). Don't use fabric conditioner as these coat the fibres so they feel soft but they inhibit absorption too.

Drying nappies – it's easy to dry your nappies on a washing line and the sunlight is excellent at bleaching out any stains. You can also tumble dry (not necessary, but speeds-up drying), but you'll need to read the nappy labels carefully to see if the waterproof part can be tumble dried – some nappies will lose their waterproofing if tumble dried. Drying inside near a radiator works well, but never put the waterproof nappy part directly on a radiator, as direct heat damages the waterproofing and you'll end up with a leaking nappy.

## If at first you don't succeed.....

Cloth nappies are all about trial and error, so if you're not getting on very well with your cloth nappies don't be put off them, just try a few nappy types to find what works for your baby. And don't be afraid to mix and match nappy parts/brands to make the best fitting and absorbent nappy for your baby - you can add extra absorbent pads to 'boost' the nappy. Anything will work, as long as you've got a waterproof outer.

Also change the nappy frequently – leaks happen when the nappy is saturated and can't absorb any more fluid, especially if the nappy then gets squashed.

If you suspect you've used too much laundry detergent (or a previous user of the nappies has), you can do a 'strip-wash' to remove it: this involves washing the nappies at 60°C with no detergent and that should wash away any excess detergent (repeat the strip-wash if you still see soap-suds in the washing machine).

But if after some trial and error they're still not working for baby and you, the Baby Bank will gladly swap your nappies for others to try.

## Further information

If you'd like to find out more, here are some helpful websites:

- <https://www.thenappylady.co.uk/news/nappy-concerns-problems.html>
- <https://www.plushpants.co.uk/cloth-nappies-explained/>
- [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/08/14/guide-to-modern-washable-nappies\\_n\\_7329406.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/08/14/guide-to-modern-washable-nappies_n_7329406.html)

There is also a cloth nappy group in Bristol which meet regularly and have a facebook group.

<https://www.facebook.com/BristolClothNappyLibrary/>