

# Real nappies - local information

## **Merseyside Real Nappy Network**

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Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority and the Districts of Merseyside have come together to inform parents that there is a choice when it comes to nappies for their babies.

## **Lizzie's Real Nappies**

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Local nappy supplier. Visits parents in their home and demonstrates the type of real nappies that are available.

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Local nappy supplier. Visits parents in their home and demonstrates the type of real nappies that are available.

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Local real nappy laundry service.

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# The real nappy handbook

an informed choice

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# Introduction - an informed choice

## **Why it is necessary to provide parents with an informed choice?**

In today's world there is great choice when it comes to the type of nappy parents wish to use on their baby. A wide range of stylish, modern and well-fitted washable cloth nappies are available, nappies which are easy to use and can be washed simply on their own or with the rest of the laundry.

Alternatively, a nappy laundry service will deliver a supply of clean, fresh cotton nappies and collect and take away the soiled ones.

Real nappies are also much kinder to the environment. They are generally made of three natural or biodegradable parts; the liner, the nappy and an outer waterproof wrap. In contrast, disposable nappies are complex products made of paper pulp, plastics and super absorbent chemicals and will not biodegrade for up to 300 years. Virtually all the nappies used and disposed of since their introduction some 40 years ago are still in landfill sites and still contain their waste.

Parents may not be aware that in the long term they could save up to £500 by using home-laundered nappies and more again if they used them on their second and even third child.

## Buying guide

### **Best nappy – what’s best for parents and baby?**

Today people have different requirements, expectations and taste. Our budgets and time management are also different, but the most important difference of them all is the shape of our babies!

The standard advice for using real nappies would be to order some trial packs from a selection of companies and then try them on the baby. Some parents will probably stay with one style whilst others may find it easier to mix and match different styles and makes of nappy.

Most nappy suppliers will be happy to accept unused and unwashed nappies. Alternatively, parents could sell used ones that are in good condition via a Real Nappy Exchange.

### **How many nappies?**

The number of nappies you need very much depends on your chosen washing regime. For example, if you laundered and dried each day then you would need six nappies and a wrap. Washing every couple of days would mean you would need 18 nappies and three waterproof wraps.

There are a huge variety of real nappies to choose from. For each of the following nappy types, you are likely to find a number of different makes:

**Shaped, fitted nappies** - have elasticated waists and legs with Velcro or popper fastenings. Some require a separate waterproof wrap, while others (all-in-ones) have a built-in waterproof layer. The nappy is used with an inner disposable or washable liner.

**All-in-ones** - are shaped nappies with integral waterproof cover fastened with Velcro or popper fastenings. The nappy is used with an inner disposable or washable liner.

**Pocket or pouch nappies** - a flat cotton nappy or other absorbent material is inserted inside a pocket/pouch of the nappy and the whole thing is placed on the baby. The nappy is used with an inner disposable or washable liner.

**Flat nappies** - include wraparounds (knitted cotton nappies with ties), prefolds (rectangles of several layers of fabric sewn together) and traditional 'terries'. Terries can be folded and held in place with pins or 'nippas', or used like prefolds as part of a two-piece system (where the nappy is folded into a pad and held in place by a waterproof wrap or pocketed pant). The nappy is used with an inner disposable liner.

**Waterproof wraps** - are made of modern, breathable fabrics or traditional wool, which you can either pull, pop or Velcro over the baby.

**Booster pads** - provide extra absorbency as and when needed and can be used with pocket or pouch nappies.



# Health

## **Nappy rash**

The type of nappy used is not a significant factor in nappy rash, according to an independent study by Bristol University. Infrequent nappy changing is the main factor of nappy rash. If a wet or soiled nappy is left on a baby for too long then germs from the bowel have time to break down the urine and release ammonia, causing inflammation of the skin. Even nappies which seem dry after a baby has urinated should be changed regularly.

## **Breatheability**

Real cotton nappies are breathable because they are made from all-natural materials and, importantly, allow air to flow. Many modern waterproof wraps are also made of breathable materials. Wool outer pants are available too.

## **Chemicals in disposables**

Most disposables contain a layer of super-absorbent gel in the fluff pulp. This draws up moisture away from the baby's skin. This gel is claimed to be non-toxic and has been approved by the American Food & Drugs Administration. However, the Women's Environmental Network (WEN) is not aware of independent UK or European tests on the gel.

## **Hormone disruptor**

In 2000, laboratory tests on several popular brands of disposables in Germany and the UK (commissioned here by the Women's Environmental Network) showed the presence of traces of Tributyl Tin (TBT), a highly toxic chemical known to disrupt sex hormones and interfere with the human immune system. Disposable nappy manufacturers have assured the WEN that their nappies are now TBT free. TBT traces may contaminate certain types of plastic during manufacture. The WEN has alerted all nappy companies to the dangers of TBT and has asked them to ensure that their products are TBT free. For this and a number of other environmental considerations we advise parents to avoid all products (including some types of waterproof wraps) made of polyurethane and PVC.

## **Scrotal temperature**

Research in 2000 suggested that disposables keep baby boys testicles at higher-than-normal temperatures, indicating a possible link to the fall in male fertility rate.

## **Public health**

A large percentage of disposable nappy waste is human excrement. The best place for excrement to be disposed of is in the sewerage system where it is effectively treated and not in landfill where live viruses could pose a risk to human health.

## **Advice to parents**

Nappies should be changed as soon as they are wet or soiled, regardless of what sort of nappy is used. Fresh air is important too – babies should go bare-bottomed as much as possible. Parents or carers of recently immunised babies should be particularly careful with cleanliness at changing times because polio can be transmitted in this manner. It is claimed that the polio vaccine can remain active for up to two weeks after it has been excreted.





## Cost factors

**Parents could save up to £500 by using home laundered nappies.**

Even when taking into account the cost of washing powder, energy and depreciation of the washing machine, washing nappies at home is the cheapest option. However, washable nappies vary greatly in price, with the traditional 'terries' and other flat nappies (prefolds and wraparounds) usually the cheapest option.

If cared for properly real nappies could potentially last for several children. Research by the Women's Environmental Network shows that the potential savings from using home laundered nappies for a first child alone could amount to £500.

Given an unbiased choice, some parents would prefer to use real nappies for a number of reasons but have found that the initial cost has been prohibitive. To offset this problem, the Merseyside Real Nappy Network has regular incentives available whilst real nappy companies occasionally have trial packs available. There are also additional resources such as second-hand nappy exchanges. This means that there doesn't need to be a huge outlay for home-laundered nappies. There is also a nappy laundry in Merseyside, which offers its services for approximately £8.50 per week.



# Washing instructions

Almost 90% of households have a washing machine so most parents will be in a position to manage real nappies if they choose to use them. In addition, biodegradable, flushable paper liners make dealing with dirty nappies even easier.

## Washing

Boil washing is the traditional way of washing and sterilising traditional nappies, for example terries. Doing this on a regular basis may reduce the life of the nappy so manufacturers generally do not recommend it. A hot wash cycle temperature at 60°C will adequately cleanse nappies.

## Drying

Sunshine naturally deodorises, sanitises and bleaches nappies. Most nappies can also be tumble-dried.

## Useful advice and safeguards

- A small plastic bin (about 20 litres) with a secure lid may be more convenient than a conventional nappy bucket.
- Biological detergents, perfumes, optical whiteners and other ingredients in ordinary washing detergents may cause skin irritation.
- Adding 1/2-3/4 cup of vinegar in the last rinse cycle will keep nappies soft.
- Beware: some commercial fabric conditioners may reduce the absorbency of nappies.
- It is important to thoroughly rinse the nappies before drying - regardless of having been just washed or soaked.

## The environment

In general terms, it is important that parents are aware of their environmental impact so that they can make informed decisions and choices. Greater environmental awareness has led to parents also identifying environmental benefits. In the case of real nappies, this has led to an increasing number choosing modern fitted or traditional terry nappies.

The UK throws away nearly 3 billion disposable nappies a year - Merseyside alone counts for around 60 million. 50 percent of the rubbish from a single household with a baby is made up of disposable nappies. 90 per cent of disposable nappies end up in landfill and estimates show that the plastics in disposables take about 300 years to fully decompose.

Disposable nappies have only been around for about 40 years, meaning that every disposable nappy which has ever been put in a landfill site is still intact.

From the moment a baby is born in a maternity hospital, the waste created is more than likely to be incinerated. Incineration of such waste is not ideal or a trouble free solution. Actually, incineration creates toxic substances such as ash and gases that are emitted to the air.

Furthermore, disposable nappies are often found in other places where they cause a mess or are an eyesore. They are often found discarded on our beaches, streets, parks and, on occasion, blocking our sewerage systems.

The simple message about using real nappies is that there are significantly fewer impacts on the environment. Even using real nappies for part of the day or night, or when visiting friends or relatives, lessens the impact of disposables and will help make a significant difference to the environment.

## Top tips

Here are some top tips about real nappies.

- Different nappies suit different babies so it is worth experimenting with a few brands before buying a full set.
- Borrow from a friend or buy a few second-hand nappies
- The number of nappies/wraps needed depends on your washing or drying facilities, baby habits and nappy type.
- The minimum suggested number of nappies is 18 along with three wraps per size (new born, baby and toddler)
- Use an energy efficient washing machine
- Wash wet nappies and waterproof wraps at lower temperatures along with the rest of your laundry
- Avoid tumble drying – hang nappies out to dry or use an ailer indoors
- Avoid soaking – store nappies dry in a lidded bucket
- Avoid using unnecessary chemicals such as conditioners and sanitisers
- Use washable liners
- Extend the life of your nappies - reuse them on another baby, or give/sell them to someone else

