

CLOTH NAPPIES EXPLAINED

Cloth nappies (also called real nappies, reusable nappies, washable nappies) have changed beyond all recognition in recent years. When parents first hear about cloth nappies, they often believe that traditional terry squares are all that's available – however modern washable nappies can be just as easy to use as a disposable nappy. Many are now shaped to fit snugly around your baby. And while some cloth nappies require a waterproof outer cover, many of the newest ones are now designed to incorporate that too, giving you an “all in one” style nappy. If you're using separate nappies and covers, it's often possible to mix and match, you don't have to have a nappy system that's purely one brand, or even restricted to one kind of cloth nappy. Many parents choose a couple of different products to suit their needs at different times. An all in one nappy might suit the nursery but at home you may prefer to use something else.

“There are so many sorts of nappies - help me out!”

There are three basic types of cloth nappies: the all-in-one (pockets and all-in-twos); the fitted (shaped) nappy; and the flat nappy (terries, prefolds and muslins). Flat and fitted nappies are part of a two-part system and require a cover (the waterproof bit). All in one nappies have their cover attached as part of the nappy.



ALL IN ONE, ALL IN TWO & POCKET NAPPIES

All-in-ones are just as simple to change as a disposable, except you wash and re-use them! They consist of an absorbent fabric inner, with an integral waterproof backing. Because the backing limits the speed of drying, they can be slow drying, and you may want to buy more to allow for this if these are your main nappy type. Many all-in-one nappies now have fold out flaps to help them dry faster, and removable boosters so you can improve absorbency for older babies. You then have the all in two which includes snap in inserts, which helps with drying time. Included in this umbrella are the pocket nappies, which go on just like an all-in-one, but the absorbent fabric part is totally removable in the wash - this means they dry faster, and you may have more flexibility on the absorbency.

PROS: Very easy to use - the most similar to a disposable nappy. Easy for other carers to get used to.

CONS: Tend to be among the more expensive options. All-in-one nappies may take longer to get properly dry and may not be suited to repeated tumble drying.



FLAT NAPPIES - TERRIES, PREFOLDS & MUSLINS

Terry squares or terries are the traditional terry towelling squares which many of us would have worn as infants. They are now available in different sizes, thicknesses, fabrics and absorbencies. Prefolds are made of several layers of ordinary cotton sewn into three panels – with the central panel having most layers. And muslins are simply muslin squares which are commonly used as burp cloths, dribble bibs and general factotums of baby wear. Flat nappies require some (simple) folding. Terries are then fastened with pins or snappies, and prefolds are simply fixed into a cover,

which holds them in place.

PROS: Flat nappies are the most economical and most versatile of all the nappies – the cheapest to buy; the easiest to care for; and they can be used for a variety of mopping up and cleaning jobs in years to come!

CONS: Require folding. Other carers may find them harder to use, although granny may be perfectly at home with them!



FITTED (SHAPED) NAPPIES - 2 PART SYSTEMS

Fitted washable nappies are shaped to fit around your baby without folding - just like a disposable, and so are easier to use than flat nappies. There are two types of fitted cloth nappy. Sized nappies come in more than one size (usually small and large), to give a better fit at each stage. One size or birth to potty nappies will adjust to fit your baby from newborn to toddler. The nappies will fasten with snaps, Velcro, or a snappie. Most fitted nappies are made by what we call WAHMS (work at home moms) they are the most expensive of all of the choices, but they are absolute works of art!

Each type has its own benefits and disadvantages, some of which are outlined here:

- **SIZED FITTED NAPPIES:**

PROS: Better fit at each stage, particularly newborns. Easy to add extra boosters if needed.

CONS: May work out more expensive, as you need to buy 2 sizes of nappy – although in some cases the large size can be used as a birth to potty option.

- **BIRTH TO POTTY (OSFM – one size fits most) FITTED NAPPIES:**

PROS: Cheaper in the long run as you only need one set. Easy to add extra boosters if needed.

CONS: Can be bulky on newborns. Can be outgrown by tall babies before toilet training.

NAPPY COVERS (nappy covers, plastic pants) Covers are the waterproof layer of the cloth nappy system. They are all shaped to fit over a cloth nappy, and they all come in different sizes. It is important that the cover fits well at the legs and waist. However, because you don't need a clean cover every time you change a nappy, you will find that four or five covers in each size will be sufficient – although you may want more of the first size if you are going to breastfeed, as breastfed poo is quite runny and gets onto the cover very easily, no matter how hard you try! Always change the cover if you get poo on it, or it is very wet. Different manufacturers' covers use different sizing systems, and have different amounts of adjustment, but the weight ranges quoted are usually accurate.

WHAT TO CHOOSE!

There are as many different factors to consider when buying nappies as there are babies to buy them for, but here are a few ideas which might be helpful:

Terries and prefolds are the least expensive and quickest to dry. All in ones are the most expensive to buy.

Absorbency varies from nappy to nappy, but in all cases can be increased by using a booster, or another nappy.

Generally speaking, I find terry towelling (cotton or bamboo) is more absorbent than microfibre or cotton flannel, as the loops present a greater surface area to the water, and allows it to be soaked up more quickly.

Bamboo and hemp are very absorbent but can be very slow drying - these fabrics are great for night nappies.

If your baby is very wriggly, consider buying nappies and covers which fasten with velcro – much easier to cope with on a determined escapee.

If your baby can undo velcro, consider terries (pins or snappies) or nappies and covers which fasten with poppers (which can be harder to undo!).

For a breastfed newborn with runny poo, a fitted nappy or a terry nappy will be the most efficient at catching the poo.

For terries and prefolds, folding can be initially daunting, but soon becomes second nature.

Night times becomes tricky and quite daunting for some as they get older, the trick is to find what works the best for you for night time, hemp fitteds are great for nights as they are super absorbant. I have 5 night time nappies, they are all fitteds, some made of hemp and some bamboo, on a wash cycle of every second or third day it generally is perfect, always have backup when it comes to teething and unexpected night time poops though, these nappies do take a bit longer to dry, but because they are pure bamboo or hemp (no waterproof added) they can be tumble dried in emergencies.

For some people their best night time solution is a flat with some boosters.

Every baby and mommy is different so you just need to find what works for you!

Whatever you choose, you will need to buy enough nappies to meet your needs. Expect a newborn to need changing 10 to 12 times a day, dropping to 6-8 times when older, depending on their wetting pattern – which you will come to know!

HOW MANY DO I BUY?

The number of nappies you will need will depend on your washing cycle – fewer if you intend to wash each day, more if you only want to wash every two to three days. I have 20 nappies for my boy – it is enough to allow me to wash every second day. Remember, if using flat or fitted nappies, you will also need four or five covers per size and perhaps more for a breastfed newborn.

TRY BEFORE YOU BUY!

It seems very overwhelming in the beginning with all of the terminology and what seems like too many types for choice but once you get into the swing of it you will know exactly what works for you and what just doesn't. I believe the best thing to do is experiment with different types of nappies before making a final decision. What works for one does not necessarily work for the other. But I will be here every step of the way to help as best I can with all nappy questions ☺

There is a fantastic cloth community on Facebook, here are some links:

South African Cloth Diaper Buy/Sell/Trade <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1462855920613981/>

This is where people sell their pre-loved nappies for next to nothing, there is always a risk buying pre-loved because you don't know if you are going to get nappies that don't even hold one wee anymore because the waterproof is delaminated, and doesn't do its job anymore, but buying preloved for the newborn stage isn't so risky as they are in them for such a short while, flats and pre-folds are ok to buy pre-loved as there is no waterproof to those and they can't lose their absorbency.

South African Cloth Nappy Users Group on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/groups/430197693769839/> here you can ask the moms how they started out and what they did, it might help out a load in making a decision. And they are all just a lovely bunch of ladies willing to help out 😊

***WASHING YOUR NAPPIES*:**

As you can imagine, Cloth Nappies undergo quite a bit of laundering in their lifetime, a good quality nappy will be washed around 300 times or perhaps more. Washable nappies will spend a lot of in time wet acidic or alkaline solutions, they go through cool wash temperatures and may be tumble dried on low heat from time to time. All of these things will all take their toll and can shorten the lifespan of your nappies.

The instructions below are a general set of washing instructions, you must always check the care label on your nappies before you use them because the manufacturer will have tested different washing scenarios.

DO'S

- **ALWAYS** follow the wash care instructions on the manufacturers label.
- **ALWAYS** wash with the correct amount of washing product. If the label on the washing product packet says wash with one cap full for a full load, use exactly that. No more and no less. If you use more it will build up in the nappies and if you use less you risk not getting the nappies clean enough.
- **ALWAYS** Fold back the hook and loop laundry tab's otherwise they will damage your nappies in the wash. Unfolded laundry tabs are a major cause of fabric balding so please, please use them.
- Use a one-way liner if you are using barrier creams. This will protect your baby's bottom by keeping it dry and it will protect your nappy from residue. It won't keep it out 100% but it will prevent it from building up.
- Liners can help prevent your nappies from staining especially from the dreaded bright yellow breastfed poo! It also makes getting rid of poo easier, not to be underestimated. You get bamboo liners (flushable) and you also get fleece liners (washable) fleece liners also provide a stay dry layer for baby's bum.
- **RINSE WELL** - Even if you are using a liner get as much poo off the nappies as you can before putting them into the nappy bucket by sluicing i.e. holding in the flush of the toilet. Or consider getting a nappy sprayer to make rinsing time super easy.
- Use non-biological powders as they are better for both baby and the environment. There is also an enzyme present in some bio detergents, which is corrosive to bamboo fibre and cotton. It works by digesting the stains out of your nappies but unfortunately takes the fabric with it! From the supermarket, I suggest liquid or anything that you find currently works best with your clothes. I personally look for more earth friendly choices that are biodegradable and won't leave any residue for our earth to cope with.
- **SUNLIGHT IS BEST** - Line-dry whenever you can. Not only will sunlight bleach stains out of your nappies but the UV radiation will help kill bacteria too.
- Some brands say you can tumble dry the nappies on a cool setting if needed but buy some pegs and save your pennies unless it is the middle of winter, then save your sanity.
- If your nappies are smelly or if you have been using a lot of nappy creams and notice that they are not as absorbent as what they were before, you may need to strip wash your nappies.

DONT'S

- **IMPORTANT:** Barrier creams, oils and bottom balms will coat the fibres in your nappy reducing their absorbency and will cause them to leak. When using a barrier cream you must always use a liner but this does not guarantee that your nappies will not suffer from a build-up. If you notice your nappies begin to leak or liquid just runs across the top and does not get absorbed, you will need to strip the oils / fats out of the nappies.

- Don't leave them for more than 2 days before washing if you want to reduce the chance of nappies staying stained or getting really smelly. Daily washing is best for your nappies.
- Don't use fabric softeners as this leaves a residue, which coats the fabric fibres and decreases the absorbency of the nappy.
- Don't soak your nappies in harsh stain removers. If you do have a pile of very stinky nappies and want to soak, use either water or a mild solution of your washing liquid and only soak for a short period of time. In the middle of summer we stored our nappies in a wet pail with just cold water, but we washed every day.
- Don't use bleach or other harsh stain removers. They will shorten the lifespan of your nappies (especially the elastic) and will void your guarantee.
- Don't use pastes of wash powder and apply direct to stains, this is too concentrated.
- Don't wash your nappies using dishwasher tabs!!
- Don't boil wash. If you are worried about bacteria, leave your nappies in bright sunlight, even a frost in winter-time is fantastic.
- Don't use Bicarbonate of Soda and Vinegar to wash bamboo nappies as it can dissolve the bamboo fibres. Whilst a lot of nappy websites recommend using them to sanitize and soften nappies they will drastically shorten their lifespan and render some guarantee's void.

A FINAL NOTE:

I have seen some very sad over laundered nappies and it just amazes me what some people do to them to keep them white or stain free. Repeat after me "Whiter than white simply ain't right"! The nappies will get loads of poo on them and over time they will become stained. Remember that if the nappy is clean, it is just a stain and if the sun doesn't get it out, it doesn't matter. The stain is on the inside of the nappy. I see mums going crazy trying to get the nappies white again and then they put them back on the baby and they poo again and the stain is instantly back. **DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE STAINS** - They are on the inside of the nappy!!

Also nappies are a fabric garment so eventually they will wear out - they will not last forever! Over time the elastic will wear out through general use. They are not made to last forever, just like your own underwear, they will wear out.

I hope this has been helpful to you 😊

Remember I am always available to answer any other questions you may have!

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