

Cloth Nappies: A Primer

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Introduction

This is a quick overview of cloth nappies. We have no affiliation with any nappy manufacturers etc.! We just have some experience and enthusiasm.

We'd generally suggest trying out a few different types, as you will get along with some better than others, and different types of nappies may fit your baby better at different growth stages too. Some of the nappy websites sell starter packs of different types of nappies.

1. Types of cloth nappies

1.1. Flats

These are your classic terry nappies. Or a muslin or an old tshirt, really. Needs pins or a "Snappi" or "Nappy Nippa" to keep it together. Needs a cover/wrap, but these can be reused multiple times with a quick wipe between uses.

Pros: very cheap, quick to dry, very versatile. **Cons:** a bit of a faff. Can be a bit overwhelming with all the types of folds.

Links: Folding terry nappies: <https://www.thenappylady.co.uk/news/terry-squares-prefold-nappies.html>

<https://www.terrynnappies.co.uk/media/wysiwyg/pdf/Folding%20Terry%20Nappies.pdf>

Catie's opinion: great for those on a tight budget. Very versatile. You might have trouble convincing childcarers to use them.

Lyndsay's opinion: useful for everyone to learn in case you get stuck without a nappy and have to use a muslin.

Examples: Bright Bots

1.2. Prefolds

Essentially like a terry nappy that has been "prefolded" to give it some layers of absorbency. Can be used with a Snappi, or put directly into wraps. Can also be used as boosters later. Needs a wrap.

Pros: very cheap, quick to dry, versatile. **Cons:** not so great for wriggly older babies. A bit of a faff.

Links: Folding prefolds:

<https://www.terrynnappies.co.uk/media/wysiwyg/pdf/Folding%20Prefolds.pdf>

<https://thiswestcoastmommy.com/6-ways-to-fold-a-prefold-diaper/>

Catie's opinion: I'd probably use these for smaller babies.

Lyndsay's opinion: I loved these for my pre-crawlers. They were cheap and worked well.

Examples: Muslinz, Seedling, Bambino Mio Miosoft, Thirsties Duo

1.3. Pockets / One Size

A wrap that has a pocket that can be stuffed with absorbent pads (including prefolds). These can come with adjustable front snaps that you can use as your baby grows (called "one size").

Pros: you can stuff them with as much as you can fit in the pocket. **Cons:**

Catie's opinion: If I were to do this again I'd probably go with pockets in the daytime, to be honest, though you can still boost all in ones!

Lyndsay's opinion: With my second child bumgenius pockets were amazing. They were thin, allowed loads of movement and quick and easy to dry. Great for daytime. I also liked alva or little bloomz for patterns.

Examples: Alva Baby, Little Lamb, Totsbots, Mama Koala, Rumparooz, Charlie Banana, Little Bloomz

1.4. Fitteds

Fitted nappies are shaped to fit around the baby, like a disposable. They are generally just made of absorbent material. You need a wrap, and possibly boosters, depending on how long you want them to last for. They usually have expansion snaps for as your baby grows

Pros: really absorbent, can last for ages **Cons:** take a while to dry. Bulky (though this doesn't seem to bother the babies).

Catie's opinion: the best for night time! I use Totsbots bamboozle fitteds with hemp babies boosters and they last easily 12+ hours.

Lyndsay's opinion: Agree. Either totsbots or little lambs for night are great. They look huge but babies don't mind.

Examples: Totsbots Bamboozle, Little Lamb Bamboo

1.5. All in Two

These are sort of in between a pocket and an all in one nappy. The inner absorbent parts snap onto the wrap and can be removed for quicker drying. They usually have expansion snaps for as your baby grows.

Pros: quicker drying than an all in one **Cons:** you're locked into boosters that fit the nappy

Catie's opinion: Just another way of putting absorbent pads inside a wrap. I feel like these would be harder to boost with aftermarket boosters but have no direct experience with them.

Examples: Totsbots Peenut, Bare & Boho, Petit Lulu, Close Pop-In

1.6. All in One

Probably the easiest to convert disposable owners over - these require little faffing about with to prep for putting on the baby. They come with the absorbent pads sewn into the wrap, and various methods for helping them to dry quicker (e.g. the pocket of the Totsbots or the open space of Bumgenius). Can be boosted (but how easily depends on the type, e.g. the Totsbots all in ones are much easier to boost without faff than the bumgenius ones). They usually have expansion snaps for as your baby grows.

Pros: very easy to convert from disposables, very little prep required, very little faffing about.

Cons: Tend to be slow to dry. Some boosters may not work with some nappies. Expensive.

Catie's opinion: This is what I went for when I first got into cloth because I had no idea what I was doing. I got half Totsbots Easy Fit Star and half Bumgenius Elementals. I'm glad I did this as they both fit my baby differently at different stages. I also stuff both with boosters and they last around 3-4 hours.

Lyndsay's opinion: The old version 2 Totsbots were good but I've been disappointed with the newer ones and the miosolos as I feel they are expensive and the outer PUL goes on them so less resale value/ they don't last for as many children if you plan on having more than 1.

Examples: Totsbots Easy Fit Star, Bumgenius Elementals, Thirsties All In One, Smart Bottoms Dream Diaper, Wizard Uno Staydry, Miosolo All in One

1.7. Specialist Nappies

Some companies produce specialist nappies for larger children or particularly heavy wetters (sometimes called night nappies). These tend to be more expensive and can be harder to find but can be a really good option, particularly if your child wets through disposable nappies at night. Most common are larger sizes of fitted nappies or pocket/ all in one style nappies with additional space for extra-large boosters or disposable boosters or pants style with boosters.

Pros: Can work out cheaper than buying / finding large size disposables, very absorbent

Cons: Tend to be slow to dry. Expensive initial cost

Lyndsay's opinion: If your child continues to wet at night these can be really useful and save loads of money. You may have to hunt around but they can be bought secondhand.

Examples: Totsbots bamboozle/ little lamb bamboo size 3; Toddlease, Eco-Pico, Bambooty XXL

1.8. Boosters

Boosters are helpful if your absorbency with the plain nappy just isn't working. They come in a lot of materials (see below) which you'll want to pay attention to. For the most part you can use any booster with any nappy, but beware of size/shape when boosting fitteds or all in ones/twos.

Catie's opinion: I started boosting at around 4 months when we started getting a lot of leaks and it helped a lot. We use Hemp Babies small boosters for the daytime and the double boosters for the night time. I also use Baba & Boo for the daytime but they are very thick, don't seem to take more liquid and take a long time to dry. They also don't fit the Bumgenius Elemental nappies very well. I use Motherease Sandys with my night time nappies and they are good too.

Examples: Hemp Babies Little Weeds/Diaper Doublers, Motherease Sandys

1.9. Wraps

Wraps are needed for flats, prefolds, and fitted nappies. You may see some advertised as double gusset - these have two gussets around the thighs that theoretically do a better job of preventing leaks, particularly in wiggly babies. But most wraps do the job, as long as you don't have anything poking out! You can reuse these multiple times if they don't have poo on them, just wipe them down if they get wet and put them on again.

Catie's opinion: I love love love the Motherease Airflow wraps, but they can be hard to get (they're very popular!). I've never had a leak with them. I even put them around disposables when I had to use them as we got leaks from the disposables all the time. If I'm low on wraps I have a couple of back up Totsbots wraps which do the job adequately. The Motherease ones come in several sizes, whereas the Totsbots one has expander snaps.

Examples: Motherease Airflow, Totsbots, Little Lambs, Bambino Mio, etc.

1.10. Materials

Nappies and boosters come in different materials. Some are more absorbent than others. Some are softer than others. Some are cheaper than others. Here we go!

Microfibre: cheap, quick to absorb, not very absorbent, prone to “compression leaks” (like squeezing a sponge).

Cotton: cheapish, average absorbency, fairly quick to absorb

Bamboo: more expensive, high absorbency, slower to absorb

Hemp: more expensive, high absorbency, slower to absorb

Charcoal additives: apparently this is supposed to help with smells.

Often what people do is pair a quick absorbency material with a slower one. For example you might want to use a mix of Bamboo and cotton/hemp at night time, and a mix of cotton/bamboo and cotton/hemp during the day. The cotton takes up the moisture quickly and disperses it into the slower absorbing bamboo/hemp. Most of the cheapest nappies are microfibre, and won't last you very long unless you pair them with a good bamboo or hemp booster.

2. Laundry

There's a lot of magic and mystery around washing nappies but it doesn't have to be that complicated. If you use too much detergent your nappies will stop being absorbent due to build up of detergent. Very hard or very soft water can affect things too, but in Leicester there isn't a huge problem with that.

Links: <http://www.uknappynetwork.org/wash.html>
<https://cleanclothnappies.com/wash-guidelines-uk/>
<https://nappysciencegang.wordpress.com/>

2.1. Detergent

Read your nappy's suggestion for the type of detergent to use, as the materials may be affected if you use bio/non-bio or you may get ammonia build up. Powder is usually preferred over liquid or capsules.

Catie's opinion: I use Persil non-bio powder, about half as much as I would for a normal load on the main wash.

Lyndsay's opinion: I always used a small amount of bio powder combined with a sanitiser such as mio or dettol and used the longest wash cycle on 40 degrees C (even for poop). I had no smells or stains in 5 years.

2.2. Front loading machines

What you want to run here is a longer rinse and spin (around 30 mins), then a longer full wash (e.g. "cotton" setting, at least 2 hours) at 40 degrees C for just wet nappies, and 60 degrees C for poopy/wet nappies, or if you have nappy rash, yeast infections, or your baby is under 3 months. A half dose of powder for the full wash is all you'll need. If there are bubbles still visible after the wash is done, you'll need to do another rinse cycle.

2.3. Top loading machines

Depending on the vigour and length of cycle of the top loader you'll probably want to run a main wash as the rinse wash with no detergent, and then a second main wash with a half dose of powder. The key thing is to ensure the detergent has been fully rinsed out at the end. Left-in detergent can build up and cause issues with your nappies. If there are bubbles still visible after the wash is done, you'll need to do another rinse cycle.

2.4. Drying

Line drying is recommended, and the sun will bleach out most stains. It may take a while if the stains are old - winter stains can sometimes take a few washes to come out if sunned. However, the radiator is just fine, though you'll find that it will take much longer in front of a radiator than on a nice sunny day! Never place nappies that come with a wrap or the wraps directly on a radiator as it can damage the material.

Lyndsay's opinion: I used to dry mine on a cool setting in a tumble dryer as it made them softer and can fix tiny holes in PUL but it is against lots of manufacturers instructions so best to do with older/ second hand nappies.

3. Accessories

3.1. Storage

"Dry pailing" is the order of the day - no need to soak nappies any more! A bucket with a mesh liner (such as a large delicates wash bag) is all that's needed, some manufacturers sell their own buckets and mesh bags too. On washing day, all that's needed is to toss the mesh bag into the machine and the nappies will work themselves out.

If you don't have space for a bucket or you have dogs/toddlers around you might want to use a large wet bag. Alva does a huge sized one that holds quite a few nappies. Once again no need to pull the nappies out - open up the bag and toss it in (you might like to fold it down a bit if the nappies don't reach the top). Double check after your rinse cycle that the nappies have all come out!

3.2. Liners

Liners are recommended mostly for solids or formula poops, which won't dissolve in water (breastfeeding poops are amazing!). However, liners can also help keep baby's bum dry and protect the nappies from nappy rash cream, so it's not a bad habit to get into using them. There are different types - paper, such as Bambinex, bamboo (many brands), and fleece, which you can buy or DIY with old or cheap fleece blankets - just make sure to test that the fleece absorbs water and that water doesn't "bead" on top of it. They can either be scraped or the poo plopped off (fleece) or disposed of entirely (paper/bamboo). Don't flush them down the loo.

3.3. Creams

Many traditional nappy rash creams can cause issues with cloth nappies, but zinc-based creams seem to be fine when used with a liner.

For everyday barrier creams, though, most non-petroleum based ones are fine.

Catie: I use Burt's Bees Diaper Ointment for when Max has a nappy rash, and Burts Bees multipurpose ointment or coconut oil for everyday use.

3.4. On the go

You'll need a smaller wet bag for day to day travelling, you can just open them up, pull out any liners or other rubbish and stick the whole thing in the wash. The small wet bags can be zipped up and won't smell.

4. Troubleshooting

4.1. Ammonia

If your nappies smell really bad when your baby wees or when they come out of the wash, it's probably due to build up of detergent. Do a strip wash (see links under laundry) and see how it goes. **Strip wash:** make sure your washing machine is clean, then put a full dose of powder in, and do multiple rinse cycles until there are no bubbles left.

4.2. Leaks

Leaks are usually due to a bad fit, moisture wicking out through a misplaced liner or part of a nappy, a boy's penis pointing upwards, or compression leaks (especially if you're using microfibre). Make sure the nappy is fitting well in the seams of the thigh of your baby and is tight enough that you can fit two fingers in, that none of the absorbent parts of the nappy are poking out, that the boy parts go downwards, and that the right size clothes are being used. Then, if you still have leaks, look at boosting the nappy (especially if the nappy is wet all through when leaking). Sometimes different nappies just fit babies better at different stages of their lives. Try changing things up a bit and seeing how it goes. If that doesn't help, try a strip wash (your detergent may be building up and preventing absorption). If all else fails, you may have to size up or down (or open/close snaps on the crotch) to fit your baby better.

4.3. Stains

Most stains will come out with a bit of sunshine. These stains can build up over winter when being dried inside, and will eventually come out when in the sun for a few wash cycles. The stains may look bad but they won't harm the baby.

5. Where to buy

Fill Your Pants: <http://www.fill-your-pants.com/>

The Nappy Lady: <https://www.thenappylady.co.uk/>

Directly from manufacturers, e.g. Totsbots

Facebook Marketplace, eBay, etc. for second hand nappies.