



Diaper debate

Nappy changes become part of the daily routine once your little bundle of joy arrives. We examine the cost and convenience issues associated with disposable and re-usable nappies.

Whether you like it or not, if you have a baby, nappies will play a large role in their life (and your life) for the first few years. If you change your baby's nappy six times a day this adds up to 42 nappies each week and means that your baby will potentially get through more than 5,000 nappies by the time they are two and a half years old! This is good news for companies such as Pampers and Huggies but it is sure to leave a big dent in your wallet. There is a long-standing debate about which type of nappy is the best to use and it is important to be aware of the benefits and the downside of each option.

Disposable nappies

Ordinary disposable nappies are convenient to use and are available everywhere from supermarkets to corner shops. Manufacturers use sizing

categories such as mini, midi, maxi and maxi plus which can get confusing, but the weight range they are suitable for is usually given as well. Disposables are costly when you consider how often babies must be changed although some now have replaceable parts so you don't have to throw away the entire nappy each time. Buying disposable nappies in bulk lowers the cost but you need to have adequate storage space in your home and, if you buy too many nappies in one size, your baby may outgrow them before you get to use them all. If you don't mind varying the brands you use, you can take advantage of the special offers that are often available in supermarkets such as 'buy one get one half price'.

Cloth nappies

Disposable nappies are not the only

option. You might be surprised to hear that cloth nappies are becoming an increasingly attractive alternative for many new parents. The bulky terry nappies of old have been redesigned and cloth nappies are now easier to use. The nappy is fastened with velcro wraps or snap buttons. Many manufacturers of these nappies use soft, biodegradable materials or recycled materials and avoid plastics, gels and bleaches. They are available in small, medium or large, and one-size-fits-all options are also available from some manufacturers. These have extra fasteners that you can adjust as your child grows. If you decide to buy re-usable nappies, you need to check what is provided and what needs to be bought separately. The different parts of a cloth nappy are:

- **Cover** - this is the outer layer and keeps the baby's clothes dry.

AT A GLANCE

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- **Nappy** - this is the absorbent layer of the nappy.
- **Liner** - this sits next to the baby's skin. Liners are optional. The main purpose of a liner is to catch solids which can then be binned or flushed away. Flushing liners may cause blockages in old or damaged drains so you may prefer washable liners.
- **Boosters** - if you experience dampness coming through the covers, you can add more absorbency to the nappy by folding boosters and placing them in the area your baby wets the most.

There are plenty of accessories available for cloth nappies but all you really need to start is disposable liners, 16-24 nappies, and three or four nappy covers to allow for emergencies and to give time for washing and drying. The number of nappies you need depends on how often you intend to wash them. If you plan to do a wash every second day the nappies will have a better chance to dry properly.

Cost of each option

Nappies are a huge expense for parents.

Before dismissing cloth nappies, it is important to consider the cost savings they can offer, especially if you plan to have more than one child as these can be kept and used again in the future. We looked at the cost of nappies in different supermarkets and compared this to the cost of buying modern, re-usable alternatives (see table).

From our survey it seems that although re-usable nappies cost a lot at the start, they work out cheaper in the long term, particularly if you have a second child who uses them. The lowest price we found for 20 cloth nappies and 4 covers was €290.40 from the Organic Cotton Shop online (see *Useful contacts*). The initial outlay for cloth nappies can be up to €500 once you have all the wipes, liners, nappies and covers you need. Washing must also be factored in. We found that keeping your baby in disposables such as Pampers can cost up to €1,200 but it can be less depending on the brand you choose (you will get more nappies in the pack when the baby is younger as the nappy size is smaller). However, wipes and disposal of nappies must still be factored in. So

it is clear that there are savings to be made by using cloth nappies.

Moltex are a brand that can be bought from Evergreen Health shops or Ecobaby (see *Useful contacts*) that use no chemicals or plastics and can be placed in the compost bin at home. However, we are unsure as to how much faster than the normal disposables they would take to decompose. They work out much more expensive than regular disposables - a packet of 40 Maxi (up to one year) Moltex nappies costs €16.59 which works out at €0.42 each.

Disposable nappy test

We noted the results on RTE's *The Afternoon Show* last year of a consumer panel made up of three mothers with babies of nappy-wearing age (see www.rte.ie/afternoonshow). The mothers tested four brands of disposable nappies on their babies and rated them on the following:

- Soakage - will it last the full night or is their baby waking up wet and uncomfortable?
- Does the nappy fall apart or stay intact when wet?

DISPOSABLE NAPPIES COMPARED					
Nappy type	Brand	Contents	Price per pack €	Price per nappy €	Total cost over 2.5 yrs of 6 nappies per day (5,460) €
Disposable*	Pampers Baby Dry 24-55lbs	48	10.49	0.22	1201.20
	Huggies Super Dry 15-31lbs	58	10.49	0.18	982.80
	Aldi Mamia Ultra Dry Nappies Maxi 15-44lbs	50	7.79	0.16	873.60
	Lidl Nappies Toujours 15-40 lbs	50	7.89	0.16	873.60
	Tesco maxi nappies 15-40lbs	56	7.79	0.14	764.40

Note: *The price of discarding of nappies in your rubbish must also be considered if you use disposables.

CLOTH NAPPIES COMPARED						
Nappy type	Brand	Contents	Price per nappy €	Price per cover €	Total cost over 2 yrs for 20 nappies and 4 covers €	Bulk buy
Cloth**	Bambino Mio www.evergreen.ie	Cloth nappy	21.25	9.99	464.96	
	Little Comfort	One Size Bamboo Nappy including 2 Boosters	14.50	13.50	344	307 for 20 one size nappies, 8 covers, 100 liners
	Bumgenius www.lifecompany.ie	All in one Cloth nappy	15.20 all in one	N/A for	304	300 for 20 nappies, 6 boosters
	The Organic Cotton Shop	One size organic cotton cloth nappy	11.95	12.85	290.40	

Note: **The price of washing and drying re-usables must be considered if you use cloth nappies. The cost of extras such as baby wipes and liners must also be considered, whichever type of nappy you choose.

- Does the nappy sag?
- The comfort and fit - how well can your child move around in them?
- Any elastic marks on the baby's legs?
- How much of a 'nappy bum' do they give (as in how bulky are they/do they make it obvious that the child is wearing a nappy)?
- What about the waist band stickers on the nappy? Do they open and close easily and sufficiently or do they fall apart at the slightest pull?
- Value for money.

The results given were all out of 15 points and were as follows:

- **Pampers** 13.5 out of 15
- **Toujours (from Lidl)** 13 out of 15
- **Huggies** 9.5 out of 15
- **Moltex** 6 out of 15

Washing cloth nappies

It is important to wash new cloth nappies a few times before you use them to ensure they are stripped of the oil that is naturally produced by the cotton. This will enhance absorption and help to prevent leaks. It is advisable to invest in a bucket with a lid, in which to store the dirty nappies on the day(s) you are not washing them. The lid will ensure that there are no unpleasant odours released into the air.

Just tip the nappies into the washing machine when you are ready to wash them. The nappies should always be washed separately from the rest of your laundry in a 60°C or 100°C cycle. Avoid using fabric softeners.

According to some manufacturers, if you use a sterilising antibacterial you can wash in a 30°C or 40°C cycle but some people might not be comfortable with using chemicals and disinfectants and might prefer to wash at the higher temperature.

Chat forums such as www.boards.ie and www.rollercoaster.ie and parenting websites are full of advice and recommendations from other parents on issues relating to buying, using and washing cloth nappies.

Some people source second hand cloth diapers through these online resources and we also came across ads for buying and selling washable nappies on www.gumtree.ie and www.rollercoaster.ie.

Laundry services

In the UK and the USA, some enterprising individuals have set up

nappy laundering services whereby they will collect the soiled nappies, wash and dry them and return them. We checked if this service is available in Ireland and found a company that attempted to provide the service around five years ago. However, they never got off the ground. "One issue that people had difficulty with was the fact that we couldn't guarantee that they would get the same nappies back, i.e. that each customer had their own batch of nappies. We had a company that was willing to test the nappies for us to check residual bacterial levels and allow us to operate to the standards set in the UK as no such standards exist here in Ireland." It is a pity that the service has not taken off here as the economies of scale involved would lead to a less detrimental impact on the environment than that from washing cloth nappies at home.

Environmental factors

A heightened focus on the environmental impact of nappy disposal may be a big deciding factor in which type some families choose. An estimated 600,000 nappies are used every day in Ireland, most of which end up in landfill sites. Many of these nappies are made using chemicals and bleaches which leach into the soil and pollute the environment. County Councils would witness a significant waste reduction in their landfill sites if even a small number of people in their area used re-usable nappies. On the other hand, washing cloth nappies means that more electricity and water is consumed. This can be reduced by ensuring you are using an energy and water efficient

washing machine. The nappies can be tumble-dried although it is more economical to air-dry them or dry them on any radiators that are being used in the house.

Sourcing alternatives

If you are planning to use cloth nappies, you might want to wait until your baby is a few weeks old before you start. If you would like to try out cloth nappies but are a little apprehensive about committing there is a way to test out the concept before making your decision. You can buy a variety of starter packs from different companies which provide cloth nappies, and then buy a larger amount of the nappies that you are happiest with for your baby.

The Mio-intro re-usable nappy kit from Bambino Mio contains three nappies, one nappy cover, 50 nappy liners and 100g of nappy cleanser. The test kit, which costs €29.95 is available at www.cleverclogs.ie and www.bambinomio.ie. The nappies are 100% cotton. Mothercare has a Terry Nappy Starter Set for €38.99. This contains a pail, a 12-pack of 100% pure cotton terry nappies, six waterproof pants for placing over the terry nappy, a pack of 100 biodegradable, flushable one-way liners, 12 snap-lock pins, 100 scented sacks, and a 500g bottle of hypoallergenic nappy soak. Mothercare in Dublin also has a Smart Nappy trial pack costing €12.99 which contains a nappy outer, a disposable pad, a re-usable pad and five nappy liners. Little Comfort (see *Useful contacts*) has trial packs including one nappy (with 2 boosters), one cover and a couple of liners that you can try out for €21.00.

Useful contacts

www.ecobaby.ie
www.evergreen.ie
www.thelifecompany.ie
www.ecobrats.ie
www.littlecomfort.com
www.totsbots.com
www.thebabyorchard.com
www.organiccottonshop.ie

Report by
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choice comment

It is not the most pleasant aspect of taking care of your baby, but at least the options are improving when it comes to changing your baby's nappy. Modern re-usable nappies are a viable choice and the manufacturers are improving on these options all the time. Many parents are re-examining all their outgoings and the cost of keeping your baby in nappies is certainly a considerable one. Although the initial outlay on cloth nappies may seem expensive, our survey shows it can pay off in the long-term. If you are not convinced, try one of the trial kits that are available.

You can have the best of both worlds if you use cloth nappies at home and keep disposables for when you are out and about. Some crèches may insist that babies wear disposables while in their care, so this is an important question to ask if you will be availing of childcare in the first two or three years. If you find the re-usable nappies are less absorbent than disposables, you can always use disposables at night-time. You will still cut some of the cost of using disposables all the time. And, if cloth nappies are still a definite no-no, look for disposables made of materials that have less damaging effects on the environment.