Your guide to using real nappies

Modern real nappies are very practical, easy to use and wash and offer parents an alternative to disposable nappies.

For over 10 years Changeworks’ Real Nappy Project provided people in Edinburgh and the Lothians with information about real nappies and starter kits, until the project ended 30 April 2016. We continue to offer starter kits so you can test before you invest. You can also find this guide on our website.

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Last updated: April 2017
Why choose real nappies?

Real nappies are reliable, comfortable, easy to use, cheaper than disposables, provide better padding when your baby starts to walk – and they prevent landfill.

Real nappies have changed a lot since their beginnings as a terry cloth square. Today’s reusable nappies are simple one-piece systems which are absorbent, waterproof and fasten with Velcro or poppers. They don’t require soaking and can be washed in a normal washing machine.

- **Comfort and reliability:** Modern cloth nappies often fit better than disposables, so they are more likely to be comfortable for your baby. They usually have elasticated legs and waist which means better containment

- **Natural protection:** Disposable nappies often contain dyes, perfumes, absorbency chemicals and gels. A cotton nappy lined with fleece will keep your baby dry and prevent nappy rash

- **Save money:** You could save £500 by using cloth nappies until your child is potty trained – more if you reuse them with your next baby or buy the nappies second hand. See comparative costs on page 7

- **Better for the environment:** Your child could use 4,000 nappies during the first two and a half years of their life. That is the equivalent of 156 black bin bags of nappies filling up your rubbish bin. These nappies will take at least 300 years to decompose in landfill.

All nappies have some environmental impact. However, by using real nappies, washing them at 40°C and air drying them, you can minimise your environmental impact. From a sanitary perspective it is also much better for sewage to be processed via the toilet and washing machine rather than dumped, untreated, in landfill.

Types of real nappy

Real nappies usually consist of a fleece or paper liner, an absorbent nappy of cotton, bamboo or fleece and a waterproof cover that work together to provide maximum comfort, reliability and efficiency. A wide range of nappy systems is available, from simple cotton squares to shaped nappies, fastened with Velcro or poppers for greater convenience.
All-in-one nappies
This nappy has a waterproof cover, absorbent inner, breathable liner and insert all built in, e.g. Totsbots Easyfit. It usually comes in one size, designed to adjust to fit the baby from birth to potty with a series of poppers.

- **Advantages**: Convenient and easy to use, simple like a disposable but designed to be washed and used again. Available in a range of styles, colours and patterns, with either poppers or Velcro fastening. Usually less bulky and slimmer fitting.

- **Disadvantages**: The waterproof layer will wear out faster than a separate waterproof wrap because the whole nappy is washed every time (manufacturer guaranteed for one year). There is only one layer of elastic around the leg so leakage is more likely for small newborns. More expensive than other nappy systems, around £15 each.

Two part system
This usually consists of a sized, shaped absorbent nappy such as a Little Lamb bamboo with a separate waterproof wrap on top. These nappies fasten with Velcro, poppers or a nappy nippa (a modern, safer version of the safety pin) and are available in two sizes:

- **Size 1** fits babies from birth up to 16–18lbs, depending on the nappy brand
- **Size 2** fits babies from 16–18lb up until potty training at around 35lbs.

- **Advantages**: A sized nappy offers a really good fit, especially on small new-born legs, and the waterproof wrap over the top means it is very unlikely to leak. The wrap does not need washing as frequently (unless soiled), so two part system nappies usually last longer than all-in-one varieties (often usable for 2–3 children).

- **Disadvantages**: You will need two sets of nappies as your baby grows so this may be more costly than a simple birth-to-potty system. On some babies the two-part system can be quite a bulky fit, which may affect trouser sizing.

Pocket nappies
Similar to all-in-ones, these nappies have waterproof covers with a pouch (pocket) into which you can place an absorbent microfiber or bamboo insert, e.g. Bumgenius V4.

- **Advantages**: Convenient and easy to use and because the pocket allows you to separate the absorbent insert, it dries
that bit quicker.

- **Disadvantages**: Same as the all-in-one nappy, mentioned earlier.

**All-in-two nappies**
These are a cross between all-in-ones and the two-part system. They have an absorbent inner pad which poppers onto the waterproof wrap to form a one piece nappy. If the pad is wet you simply put in a fresh one. If the wrap is wet you can allow it to air dry and use it on the next nappy change. If it is soiled then you wash it like an all-in-one.

- **Advantages**: Same as the all-in-one nappy but likely to last longer as the waterproof wrap does not need to be washed every time. Can be un-popped for ease of washing and drying.

- **Disadvantages**: Sometimes leakage from the pads onto the wrap means washing the whole nappy quite frequently.

**Birth-to-potty nappies**
A shaped nappy with a series of poppers which makes it adjustable to fit your growing baby. Some brands, e.g. Motherease One Size, require a separate waterproof nappy wrap over the top, while others, e.g. Totsbots Easyfit, have the waterproof layer built in.

- **Advantages**: Only one set needed, which should last from birth until your baby is potty trained.

- **Disadvantages**: The fit may be compromised at the lowest and highest ends of the weight range, which may lead to leakage.

**Flat nappies**
The original cloth nappies, Terry squares and prefolds, can be folded in a variety of ways to fit any size of baby. Made from cotton or bamboo, they are fastened by a nappy nippa and require a waterproof nappy wrap over the top.

- **Advantages**: Flat nappies can be bought in different sizes but many parents use the 60cm x 60cm size and adjust the fold to fit the baby. They are cost effective and quick drying.

- **Disadvantages**: The folding can put some people off. Flat nappies do not have elastic around the legs and back, so for containment they may be less reliable.
Nappy wraps, liners and boosters

Nappy wraps
These are waterproof or water resistant covers that go over a separate absorbent nappy to keep clothing dry and clean. They can be made of polyurethane laminate (PUL), fleece or wool.

The most popular fabric for nappy wraps is PUL, which is polyester bonded to a urethane laminate. This provides a waterproof barrier but remains soft to the touch. The wrap fastens over the nappy with Velcro or poppers and comes in sized or birth-to-potty systems. Unless they are soiled, wraps do not need to be washed at each nappy change and can just be left to air.

Polyester fleece wraps are not waterproof but they are breathable, allowing air exchange through the fabric and enabling some of the wetness to evaporate. This helps to keep the nappy area cool and dry, making them ideal for babies with sensitive skin, on warm summer days or for night nappies.

For a natural choice wool wraps are breathable and water resistant.

Liners
Liners are used to catch solid waste and are placed inside the nappy next to the skin. The liner allows the wetness to pass through it into the nappy, which keeps the baby’s bottom drier. There are two types of liners: flushable paper and reusable fleece.

Flushable liners are made of thin paper, almost like toilet paper, which can be flushed down the toilet if stated by the manufacturer or put into your bin. If they have not been soiled they can be washed in the machine and reused several times.

Reusable fleece liners are made from microfibre and are very good at drawing the moisture away from the baby’s skin. Poo can be sluiced down the toilet before the liner is machine washed with your nappies. You can buy these liners ready-made or make them yourself by cutting up a piece of fleece.

Boosters
Booster pads come in a variety of materials, e.g. bamboo, and are designed to add extra absorbency to your nappy. They are especially useful for overnight use or for babies who are heavy wetters.
**Real nappies at night**

For parents with an older baby who is sleeping through the night, real nappies are very effective and are likely to out-perform disposables. However, you will need a highly absorbent nappy with a good fit at the waist and legs. You can either add booster layers to your normal daytime nappies, making sure you have a well-fitting wrap, or you can buy a specially designed night-time nappy.

Specialist night nappies include:

- Night Notions by Wee Notions
- Luscious Little Somethings Night Nappy
- Holdens Landing Bedbug (sizes up to 60lb+)
- Ella’s House Bum Hugger

All of the super absorbent night nappies above have sizes up to 35lb+, and require a separate wrap on top. See where to buy reusable nappies, page 10.

For older toddlers and young children who are transitioning out of nappies the Motherease Bedwetter Pants are a good option as they can be pulled up and down by the child so they can go to the toilet by themselves if they wake in the night. These pants are also absorbent enough to contain quite big night-time accidents. They have a cotton terry inner and built in waterproof layer so no wrap is required. Turn the pants completely inside out for quicker drying. Sizes to 65lb+.

**Night nappy top tips**

- It is very important to use the correct size of wrap:
  - A wrap that is too large will leak around legs and waist
  - A wrap that is too small will also leak as it is too tight to contain the absorbent material comfortably
  - You might need a larger size wrap for night time, to accommodate the extra absorbency.
- Experiment with different combinations of boosters and wraps. You may need to tweak a previously reliable combination or try something new as your child gets older and becomes a heavier wetter.
- Start with more absorbency than you think you need (add extra boosters) and then reduce until you find what works and what is comfortable. Remember to add extra if your baby has drunk a lot before bedtime.
- You will probably not need a paper liner in night nappies as older babies tend not to poo at night. However, a stay-dry fleece liner next to baby's
skin is a very good idea otherwise their skin will be exposed to wetness for a long time.

- Breathability is important in a night nappy so don’t fit a wrap too tight, but make sure it is snug enough not to leak. The more the nappy can ‘breathe’ the less moisture there is next to baby’s skin as it evaporates overnight. Fleece wraps or lanolised wool wraps give the most breathability, but need great absorbency to work successfully - you will often find that pyjama bottoms feel a little damp with these two types but the nappy itself will be a lot less wet. Waterproof airflow wraps work well too - it just depends what feels comfortable and reliable.

What are real nappies made from?

Real nappies are available in a range and mix of materials including cotton, bamboo, hemp and fleece.

**Bamboo**

Bamboo fabric is very soft and stays soft after many washes. It’s also strong, durable, very absorbent and thin, so it fits neatly on the baby. It has a lower impact on the environment as it is fast growing and can be harvested continually. Thanks to its natural resistance, bamboo needs less chemical treatment in comparison to cotton.

Disadvantages: In a home with no central heating, bamboo nappies can take up to 36 hours to dry. They dry much faster on a washing line in the summer and in the winter if you have the central heating on.

**Cotton**

Strong, durable and soft, cotton is ideal for nappies. It is mid-range in terms of absorbency and drying time. Organic and/or unbleached cotton is kinder to the environment than ‘regular’ cotton because fewer chemicals are used in farming and manufacture.

Disadvantages: Cotton can go a bit hard after long term use but if you knead nappies after they have dried, this keeps them soft.

**Microfibre**

A man-made fabric mainly made from polyesters, tough but very soft to the touch. Microfibre fleece is good at drawing moisture away from the skin so it’s great for nappies, booster pads and reusable liners. If drying your nappies is an issue or you’re in a hurry, microfibre is fantastic – the fabric will be almost dry after a spin in your washing machine.
Disadvantages: Microfibre absorbs less liquid so the nappy needs to be changed quite quickly once it becomes wet.

How to look after your nappies

Please follow the manufacturer's guidelines when it comes to washing your nappies. If your nappies are new, wash them several times before using them to build up their absorbency.

After changing your baby’s nappy, flush as much of the poo as you can down the toilet. Used nappies should be stored in a lidded bucket without water or soaking solution. This is called dry-paling. When you have enough nappies for a load, put them into the washing machine with a small amount of non-bio detergent (half the manufacturers recommended amount) and NO fabric softener. Softeners and too much detergent coat the material fibres and make them less absorbent. Be aware that some detergents may cause skin issues. Do your research and find out what works best for you and your baby. Some people like to do a rinse cycle in their washing machine before they wash their nappies but this is not always necessary. After doing a rinse cycle you can add extra clothing to make a full load. Manufacturers usually recommend a 60°C wash but nappies can be washed most of the time at 40°C.

Line drying will help the softness of your nappies and reduce your environmental impact. Try to avoid using a tumble dryer as it is more costly – for your pocket and the environment, and shortens the life span of nappies.

Unfortunately at this time there is not a nappy laundry service in Edinburgh.

Costs

According to UK organisation Go Real, the average child will be in nappies for two and a half years, which could cost around £820 if you were to use disposable nappies, based on a cost of 15p per nappy and an average of six nappies per day.

Go Real estimates it could cost as little as £70 to kit out your baby with a basic set of terry squares and wraps, or a collection of second hand nappies, plus washing costs of £42 a year including detergent. Meanwhile 20 new bamboo nappies and waterproof wraps, or 20 new all-in-ones cost £170 and £320 respectively.
Real nappies range in price from approximately £2 for a flat cotton nappy, £3 for a good quality second-hand nappy, £9 for a shaped nappy or a waterproof nappy wrap and £15 for an all-in-one. Some people are also given second-hand nappies by family or friends, or get them free from Freegle, Freecycle or Edinburgh Gumtree.

What you need to get started

Before you splash out on a whole set of nappies, why not try our starter kit before you invest. It is subsidised by the City of Edinburgh Council to give Edinburgh residents a head start on reusable nappies and help them reduce the number of disposable nappies sent to landfill.

If you are going to use real nappies most of the time you will need:

- Around 20 nappies, depending on how often you are going to wash them. New babies generally need 8–10 nappy changes daily but fewer changes are needed as babies get older
- Around 3–5 wraps if you are going to use the two-part system
- Liners, flushable versions are available on a perforated roll of 200 or washable fleece liners come in packs of 10–20 (or cut up a piece of fleece)
- About eight booster pads for extra absorbency
- A lidded bucket for storing soiled nappies
- A nappy wet bag for carrying used and clean nappies when you are out and about.

Starter kits

If you live in Edinburgh, you can try out real nappies at a subsidised cost. The starter kit is a ‘taster’ package, helpful if you would like some brand new nappies to keep and to see which styles of nappy suit you and your baby.

The starter kit costs £20 if you live in Edinburgh, where it is subsidised by City of Edinburgh Council. Proof of address is required.

To register your interest in a starter kit, fill in our online form.

You can arrange to collect your kit from the Changeworks’ office, or the starter kit can be posted to you using the Royal Mail ‘recorded signed for’ service
which costs £4.90.

**Please note!** Kits are limited to one per household and are for parents who are not already using real nappies on their baby.

A starter kit contains three brand new nappies plus accessories worth £48, which are yours to keep. You receive:

- Tots Bots Easyfit All-in-one, or a Teenyfit in the new-born kit
- Tots Bots bamboo stretch nappy
- Little Lamb microfibre fleece nappy
- Little Lamb waterproof wrap
- Billou wet bag, two Ruby Red Designs reusable wipes and some Little Lamb paper liners.

Starter packs come in three sizes: small (6–14lb), medium (9–18lb) and large (18–35lb).

**Where to buy real nappies**

**Local real nappy suppliers**
A number of national chain stores sell real nappies. Larger Boots stores stock Bambino Mio and own brand Terries, buckets and paper liners. Large Mothercare stores stock own brand Smart Nappies, Tots Bots, buckets and liners – these can be ordered on request to their Edinburgh Hermiston Gait and Fort Kinnaird Retail Park stores.

**Online suppliers of real nappies**
Bambino Mio: [www.bambinomio.com](http://www.bambinomio.com)
Clean Green [www.cleangreennappy.co.uk/](http://www.cleangreennappy.co.uk/)
Daizy Babies: [www.daizybabies.com](http://www.daizybabies.com)
Eco Earth: [www.ecoearthnappies.com](http://www.ecoearthnappies.com)
Fill Your Pants: [www.fill-your-pants.com](http://www.fill-your-pants.com)
Kingdom of Fluff [www.kingdomfluff.co.uk](http://www.kingdomfluff.co.uk) (wide selection of night nappies)
Little Green Earthlets: [www.earthlets.co.uk](http://www.earthlets.co.uk)
Little Bloom all in ones – available on [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)
Little Lamb: [www.littlelamb.co.uk](http://www.littlelamb.co.uk)
Nature Babies: [www.naturebabies.co.uk](http://www.naturebabies.co.uk)
Ruby Red Designs Reusable Wipes (made in Dingwall, Scotland): [http://stores.ebay.co.uk/Made-By-Ruby-Red-Designs](http://stores.ebay.co.uk/Made-By-Ruby-Red-Designs)
The Nappy Lady: www.thenappylady.co.uk (also gives advice on choosing nappies)
The Nappy Stash: www.thenappystash.co.uk/
The Real Nappy Company: www.therealnappycompany.co.uk
Tots Bots: www.totsbots.com
Tiny Nippers: www.tinynippers.co.uk
Twinkle Twinkle: www.twinkleontheweb.co.uk
Wee Notions: www.weenotions.co.uk/

Second-hand nappies
The Nappy Site: www.thenappysite.co.uk
The Used Nappy Company: www.usednappies.co.uk
The Cloth Nappy Tree: www.clothnappytree.com
Edinburgh Gumtree: www.gumtree.com/edinburgh
The Nappy Exchange: email nappyexchange@wen.org.uk

Local second-hand nappy sales
Pregnancy and Parents Centre: www.pregnancyandparents.org.uk
National Childbirth Trust: www.nct.org.uk/in-your-area
Relove (buggy repair centre): www.buggyrepaircentre.co.uk

Donate nappies

Changeworks can no longer accept donations of second hand nappies. However once your child has outgrown their reusable nappies, you can pass them onto a friend or family member, or donate them to the Edinburgh Real Nappy Community (details below) or the Pregnancy and Parents Centre, where they will be resold for a small price to help continue their services. The Pregnancy and Parents Centre is located at 10 Lower Gilmore Place, Edinburgh EH3 9NY.

If the nappies have really seen better days, you can take them to a fabric bank for recycling. Find a local fabric bank on the Greener Scotland website.

Edinburgh Real Nappy Community

If you would like further advice about reusable nappies or you want to see a range of real nappies in action, in person, then you might like to check out the Edinburgh Real Nappy Community on Facebook. This group is run by some of our former volunteers and provides pop up demo events, a cloth nappy library and sells second hand nappies at the Pregnancy and Parents Centre Nearly New
Sales.

Useful links
- Go Real: The Real Nappy Information Service [www.goreal.org.uk](http://www.goreal.org.uk)
- The Nappy Lady on cloth vs disposable nappies [thenappylady.co.uk/clothvdisposablenappies.html](http://thenappylady.co.uk/clothvdisposablenappies.html)

Disclaimer: Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this guide, some content is naturally subject to change. Changeworks provided impartial advice on real nappies. Our starter kits contain nappies recommended as reliable by volunteers and kit recipients.

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Last updated: April 2017