



cloth diapering  
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# a quiet place

## *a tale of two diapers*

ANA JUNE



Peggy O'Mara

PROCTER AND GAMBLE (P&G) introduced Pampers in 1961, and by the 1970s serious environmental concerns had begun to surface about disposables. Pennsylvania Boy Scouts conducting a highway cleanup campaign in 1971 reported that throwaway diapers were the single largest source of litter.

In 1975, *Consumer Reports* compared different brands of disposable diapers and noted that trees are cut down in their manufacture; environmentalists today suspect that some disposables come from old-growth Canadian forests. *CR* also published the information that intestinal and live vaccine viruses had been found in feces in disposable diapers removed from “sanitary” landfills, that flushing diapers could damage septic tanks, plumbing lines, and sewage-treatment plants, and that only commercial incinerators can safely burn disposables. Concern about human feces in landfills grew so great in the 1970s that the World Health Organization called for an end to the inclusion of urine and fecal matter in solid waste.

Parents, too, were concerned. They had begun to notice more diaper rash with disposables. The September 1979 edition of *Pediatrics*, the journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, called for limiting the use of disposables because a study had found that disposables caused more frequent and more severe diaper rash. That year, Oregon proposed a bill to ban the sale of disposables.

Nevertheless, P&G reported that more than 40 percent of newborns in US hospitals were diapered in Ultra Pampers in 1986. Introduced in 1985, the Ultra Pampers was the first US diaper to contain sodium polyacrylate, a superabsorbent polymer (SAP) that can absorb up to 100 times its weight in liquid.

SAPs, used initially in the US in the late 1960s by the United States Department of Agriculture, were first used in diapers in Japan, in 1982. The original superabsorbent diapers contained five to six grams of SAPs per diaper. Today's new, thinner disposables have less wood pulp and more SAPs: 10 to 15 grams per diaper. Superabsorbent diapers currently on sale at natural grocery stores contain SAPs.

SAPs can cause severe skin infections or worse. In the 1980s, SAPs were removed from superabsorbent tampons because the material increased the risk of toxic shock syndrome.

In 1988, P&G commissioned a three-year study at the University of Michigan to determine the effects of sodium polyacrylate in disposable diapers in landfills. The study showed that SAPs are environmentally safe. However, the OSHA “Material Safety Data Sheet on Superabsorbent Polymer” states, “Preexisting skin or breathing disorders may become aggravated through prolonged exposure.” A study in the September 1999 issue of *Archives of Environmental Health* found that laboratory mice exposed to various brands of throwaway diapers suffered eye, nose, and throat irritation, including bronchoconstriction similar to that resulting from an asthma attack. The lead author of the study advised asthmatic mothers to avoid exposure to the chemicals found in most throwaway diapers.

In 1989, the National Association of Diaper Services (NADS) commissioned Carl Lehrburger of Energy Answers Corporation to study throwaway diapers. Lehrburger concluded that each family that chooses cloth diapers prevents one ton of waste from entering the solid-waste stream each year.

Diaper services were almost extinct in the late 1970s because of the introduction of throwaway diapers, but grew by more than 70 percent in the 1980s. Hundreds of news stories were published on the environmental impact of throwaway diapers, and parents increasingly demanded reusable cotton diapers.

Competing interests, however, conspired to undermine this trend. In June 1989, Gerber Childrenswear and Dundee Mills, major manufacturers of cotton diapers, lobbied the US Congress for quotas on the imported Chinese cloth diapers used by US diaper services and independent retailers of cloth diapers. The quota resulted in a cloth-diaper shortage, created waiting lists at diaper services, and put many small diaper retailers out of business.

Despite the quota, legislation against disposables mushroomed. In July 1989, Connecticut began to phase out the use of all disposable products, including those used in patient care. Oregon created a 50 percent recycling credit for diaper services. New Jersey legislated a tax on the manufacture of all “disposable, ‘one-way,’ non-reusable or non-returnable products.” Connecticut and New York considered requiring labels on all diaper products stating the environmental hazards associated with their disposal. Nebraska banned the sale of all non-biodegradable diapers, effective 1993.

In 1990, the 20th anniversary of Earth Day, legislation was introduced in 24 states and dozens of smaller jurisdictions to reduce the use of disposable diapers. That year, P&G commissioned a study from Arthur D. Little. Little concluded that laundering a cloth diaper over the course of its lifetime consumes up to six times as much water as that used to manufacture a single-use diaper. In addition, the study concluded that laundering cloth

diapers produced nearly ten times the water pollution created in manufacturing throwaways.

Little’s study was widely criticized for not using independent data and for relying on information gathered by P&G and the single-use diaper industry. The study was further compromised because of a mathematical error, and discredited for failing to account for the water used in flushing fecal matter from single-use diapers. Nonetheless, it marked a turning point. It was the beginning of public confusion about the environmental impact of throwaway diapers.

Under the auspices of the American Paper Institute, P&G used the Little data in a 1990 letter to US legislators, but failed to disclose that the study had been funded by P&G. The company also sent 14 million pamphlets—along with discount coupons for Luvs and Pampers—to US households, claiming that their diapers could be effectively composted in municipal solid-waste plants, even though within a year they would abandon their own efforts to recycle disposable diapers as economically unfeasible.

Ads appeared in more than a dozen major magazines featuring photographs of seedlings growing in pots filled with dark, porous-looking earth. The ads claimed that 80 percent of each plastic-and-paper diaper was “compostable” and could be converted into a “rich, high-quality soil enhancer that’s good for planting baby flowers, trees and just about anything that grows.” By some estimates, P&G spent \$250 million in 18 months on advertising. Their PR blitz was a success, and eventually led to the demise of the cloth diaper and diaper-service industries in the US.

In 1991, Carl Lehrburger undertook a life-cycle analysis of diapers, his second study for NADS. It was the most detailed study to date of the environmental impact of single-use diapers and the first one not funded by the disposables industry. Lehrburger found that, compared to reusable diapers, throwaways generate seven times more solid waste when discarded and three times more waste in the manufacturing process. In addition, effluents from the plastic, pulp, and paper industries are far more hazardous than those from

Approximately **7 billion gallons of oil**  
each year are required to feed our disposable-diaper habit today,  
almost **four times** as much oil as is estimated to be in  
the **Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.**

the cotton-growing and -manufacturing processes. Single-use diapers consume less water than reusables laundered at home, but more than those sent to a commercial diaper service. Washing diapers at home, however, uses 50 to 70 gallons of water about every three days—about the same as flushing a regular-flow toilet five times a day. These 1991 figures for gallons of water could probably be improved on using today's more energy-efficient washing machines.

According to the American Petroleum Institute, 3.5 billion gallons of oil were used to produce the 18 million throwaway diapers that Lehrburger studied in 1991. Approximately 7 billion gallons of oil each year are required to feed our disposable-diaper habit today, almost four times as much oil as is estimated to be in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

In 1991, the Landbank Consultancy, an independent environmental agency in the United Kingdom, reviewed and evaluated the available research on the environmental impact of throwaway diapers. Their conclusion: compared to cloth diapers, throwaway diapers use 20 times more raw materials, three times more energy, and twice as much water; they generate 60 times more waste.

Using the Landbank Report, the Women's International Network challenged P&G's environmental equivalency claims before the UK's Advertising Standards Authority, which ruled that P&G's claims were misleading. Under pressure from the press, P&G withdrew its claims.

The Women's Environmental Network joined with other groups in 1994 to demand a Federal Trade Commission investigation of the single-use diaper industry, charging the industry with deceptive advertising of environmental and health outcomes. P&G paid out-of-court settlements to the New York City Consumer Protection Board and to the Attorneys General of at least ten states for misleading advertising claims related to the recycling and composting of Pampers and Luvs. Environmental groups nationwide presented Earth Day awards to cloth diapers, but these amounted to little more than a eulogy. Later, the Sierra Club would list the loss of cloth diapers as one of the top environmental tragedies of the 20th century.

Between 1996 and 1997, the production of cloth diapers dropped 35 percent, the membership of NADS dropped 37 percent, and disposable diapers rose as a percentage of solid waste in landfills. Today, 98 percent of all diaper-using

Compared to reusable diapers, throwaways generate **seven times more** solid waste when discarded and **three times more waste** in the manufacturing process.

households use throwaway diapers, which have become a \$19 billion global industry.

According to a recent online survey conducted by The Green Guide Institute ([www.thegreenguide.com/justask/board.mhtml?bid=59](http://www.thegreenguide.com/justask/board.mhtml?bid=59)), 55 percent of respondents used both cloth and disposable diapers, while 33 percent used only disposables, 16 percent used only cloth, and 26 percent used a diaper service. Of those who use cloth diapers, 90 percent said they were concerned about the impact of disposables on the environment. Those who used both types used disposables most when traveling, or when away from home for more than a few hours or at night. Over 70 percent of those who used cloth used their own washer and dryer to clean their diapers.

### What's an environmentally conscious mother to do?

Join the cloth-diapering renaissance. Dozens of companies online and in these pages sell all varieties of cloth diapers and accessories. Don't be intimidated by the plethora of choices; cloth diapering is very simple, and much less expensive than disposables. You need only a few dozen diapers, some pins or fasteners, a few diaper covers, and a container to store the diapers in until you wash them. If you haven't done so already, give them a try.

Join the cloth-diapering forum at [www.mothering.com/discussions](http://www.mothering.com/discussions)—it's among our most popular. Read *Mothering's* how-to article, "Crazy for Cloth," in the January–February 2003 issue, or online at [www.mothering.com/articles/new\\_baby/diapers/crazy-for-cloth.html](http://www.mothering.com/articles/new_baby/diapers/crazy-for-cloth.html). Check out the Real Diaper Association at [www.realdiaperassociation.org](http://www.realdiaperassociation.org). If you're in the area, attend the organization's cloth-diaper demonstration at the Green Festival in Washington, DC, September 24 and 25. *Mothering* will be hosting the Green Kids Zone.

Most important, ask an experienced and enthusiastic user of cloth diapers to show you how it's done. Cloth diapers are an idea whose time has come again.



# dumping disposa

## // "I'll definitely give them a try."

Before the birth of my daughter, that was my tentative answer to questions from friends and family about cloth diapers. In my head, I was weighing the stereotypical cloth-diaper routine of pins and plastic pants, smelly diaper pails, and red bottoms against the carefree ease of disposable diapers. I was familiar with the environmental problems caused by disposables, but did this first-time mother really want yet another hassle?

In the first two months after Amelia was born, I didn't. Albeit with a slightly guilty conscience, I used the mother lode of disposables given to me at my baby shower, and passed up opening the packages of diaper pins and vinyl pants I'd also received. But as my stock of disposables dwindled and Amelia and I settled in to our new life together, the thought of continuously buying—and supporting the makers of—disposable diapers made me sick.

I began asking cloth-using mothers about their diapers, and exploring cloth-diaper websites.

I discovered a world I'd never known existed. I found an amazing array of diaper choices (no pins or plastic pants required), and a loyal, dedicated group of eco-friendly mothers offering helpful advice and support in online forums and bulletin boards. I've since happily made the switch to cloth diapers, and want to share what I've learned so that you, too, can make a truly informed diapering choice.

## cloth choices

Parents have a broad selection of cloth diapers to choose from, many of them designed by clever, crafty moms who put their ingenuity and experience to work. However, choosing the diapers that fit your preferences and budget can be an overwhelming process for the uninitiated. The first step in switching to cloth is to become familiar with the



# ble diapers

Making the big switch to cloth is easier than you think. And Mother Earth will thank you.

BY LINDSAY EVANS

selection of diapers on the market today. Armed with this information, you'll be able to choose the diapering system for you.

Most people, when they think of cloth diapers, think of old-fashioned **cotton prefolds**. Many mothers are content using these traditional and affordable diapers today, in combination with modern, well-designed diaper covers. While mothers diapering in earlier generations would pin a prefold diaper on a baby, mothers today have the option of using a plastic Snappi fastener (pictured at the center of page 6) to secure the diaper, or skipping this step altogether and using the waterproof cover to hold the diaper in place. **Diaper covers** are designed to keep the prefold snug next to your baby. Just fold the diaper in thirds, place it in the waterproof cover, and slide it under baby. Next, pull the diaper-cover combo up through baby's legs and secure with the cover's Velcro or snaps. Diaper covers are comfortable,

they can "breathe," and they're made of everything from polyester to organic cotton or wool. They're also offered in fun colors and prints.

**Contoured and fitted diapers** are made to fit baby's shape, making diapering even easier. Contoured diapers are designed to fit snugly into a diaper cover without any folding involved. Their hourglass shape ensures that the diaper stays in place inside the cover. **Fitted diapers** take the idea even further by adding stitched-in elastic around the leg openings and waist, and Velcro or snap closures for a perfect fit under the diaper cover. Fitteds reduce the chance of messy blowouts; you might get through many changes of the diaper while keeping the cover clean enough to re-use.

**All-in-one and pocket diapers** are closest to disposables in construction and ease of use. All-in-ones combine a waterproof cover with several layers of absorbent cotton or hemp into

**Above:** Delightful updates to the old tried-and-true shown here (from left to right): Hand-Painted Tie Dye All-In-One (AIO), sewn using AIO Kit from DiaperKit; Green Sprouts Bamboo Diaper Cover from i play; Mums Bums AIO diaper from Happy Tushies; Softbums All-in-Two diaper; Baby BeeHinds One-Size Bamboo Fitted Diaper from Not Your Mama's Cloth Diapers; Bummi's Super Whisper Wrap polyester diaper cover; and Kissaluv's fitted diaper.



Cloth diapers directly save thousands of tons of solid waste from ending up in landfills each year, put human waste in sewer or septic

While mothers diapering in earlier generations would pin a prefold diaper on a baby, mothers today have the option of using a plastic Snappi fastener (at right) to secure the diaper, or skipping this step altogether and using the waterproof cover to hold the diaper in place.

a one-piece diaper. Pocket diapers consist of a waterproof outer layer stitched to an inner layer of fleece or other material that allows moisture to flow through. Anything absorbent, such as a regular cotton prefold or a microfiber or hemp insert, is stuffed into the pocket between the layers. The beauty of these diapers is that your baby's skin stays dry against the inner fabric as moisture is pulled into the insert. All-in-ones and pockets are especially popular with dads and other caregivers who might otherwise be unwilling to hassle with cloth diapers.

Still unsure which style of cloth diaper will work for you? I use a **combination of 12 pocket diapers with microfiber inserts**, along with cotton-flannel prefold diapers with polyurethane laminate covers. This combination works well for me, but be willing to experiment to find what works for you. Many cloth-diaper websites offer, at a discounted price, "starter packs" that include several different styles of diapers. Before you make your investment, ask cloth-diapering moms you know about trying out a diaper or two at home, or check out websites such as [www.diaperswappers.com](http://www.diaperswappers.com) or eBay to find great deals on gently used cloth diapers.



### cloth diaper care

Yes, you do have to get used to the idea of not simply tossing away those messy disposable diapers. In fact, disposing of human waste in landfills is not just a bad idea, it's *illegal* (users

of disposables, too, are supposed to flush the poo). Every mother is required to become intimately involved in her child's potty practices, whether she minds it or not. Learning to properly clean and care for your diapers will quickly become just another task that comes along with mama territory. What's more, cloth-diapering mamas often develop a sense of pride in knowing that their extra work does what's best for their babies and the environment.

**When it's time to change a diaper**, separate the diaper or insert from the cover and store them separately (except for all-in-ones). Storing dirty diapers with dirty covers until wash day will wear out the covers early and lock in odors. Shake or scrape poo into the toilet—or, if your baby is exclusively breastfed, don't even bother. You can dunk diapers in the toilet, but many mothers choose to add another wash cycle to their routine and let the machine do the work. I put my dirty diapers and inserts in a dry, uncovered diaper pail, and the dirty covers and pocket diapers in a breathable mesh bag. There really is **no need to soak** diapers in the pail, as mothers used to—and a bucket full of water is a drowning hazard. Soaking diapers in your washing machine works well. Fill up your machine with cold water and set it for a short wash or soak cycle.

**Your wash routine** will vary based on the style of diaper you choose. Your diapers may be made of different fabrics that require different washing methods. Always follow the washing instructions on the label, or contact the manufacturer or retailer with any questions. In general, cotton or hemp prefolds



systems where it belongs, and require a relatively small amount of water per wash—equivalent to five flushes of the toilet.

MELISSA HOLIK

and microfiber inserts will need a good, long wash on the Hot setting. Most covers and pocket diapers do best with a warm or cold wash; hot water wears out their waterproofing. A couple of wash cycles, with plenty of water and room to agitate, are usually needed to get diapers truly clean.

On wash day (every two to three days), use a small amount of clean-rinsing detergent without perfumes or dyes to clean diapers thoroughly without leaving any residue. End your wash routine with an extra rinse to avoid detergent buildup. Synthetic fabrics are especially prone to buildup, which can lead to red bottoms and smelly diapers.

If you do encounter smelly diapers, the



ADRIENNE SCHROEDER

problem is either detergent buildup or bacteria. Try washing them a few times on Hot with no detergent, then hang in the sun to dry. Sunlight will naturally remove any stains and kill bacteria. Or try adding to your wash a few drops of tea-tree oil or a natural enzyme product. Chlorine bleach is not recommended for use on diapers, and will void any warranty they may come with. Some mothers report good results with an oxygen-based whitener, but check with your diaper manufacturer before use.

### traveling

On your next trip with baby, you don't need to revert to using disposables. Remember, in our mothers' and grandmothers' generations, disposables were used rarely or weren't even an option—so don't feel guilty about needing to do a load of diapers when visiting family members. Besides, you just might get an informative earful from mom or grandma about the trials of cloth diapering in her day.

Plan ahead to decide how many diapers and covers you'll need, keeping in mind whether you'll be able to wash them during your trip (if you plan to wash, don't forget your detergent). Bring your most reliable diapers; this is not the time to try out a new diaper that might not fit.

**Disposable diaper liners** are a great option to keep your dirtied diapers cleaner while you're traveling (these shouldn't be used in a house that has a private septic system, however). With liners, your diapers will be easier to clean when you do wash them, whether at your friend's house, at a

**Above:** Diapers so stylish you won't want to cover them up! Shown here (from left to right): Bummi's Super Brite polyester diaper cover; Haute Pocket One-Size Pocket Diaper from Nicki's Diapers; Blueberry One-Size Minky Pocket Diaper; Tiny Tush Elite One-Size Pocket Diaper; Baby BeeHinds Wool Wrap from Not Your Mama's Cloth Diapers; Blueberry One-Size Minky Pocket Diaper; Baby BeeHinds Magic-Alls AIO from Not Your Mama's Cloth Diapers; and Punkin Butt Contour Diaper.



I discovered a world I'd never known existed. I found an amazing array of diaper choices (no pins or plastic pants required),

Yes, you do have to get used to the idea of not simply tossing away those messy disposable diapers.

self-service laundry, or once you get home.

A **diaper bag** designed with the cloth-diapering mama in mind is a necessity for a day out and about. Bring along diapers and covers for the day, cloth wipes and a gentle cleaning solution to wet them with, and a waterproof bag or tote to hold dirty diapers.

**Wet bags**, available at many cloth-diaper retailers in a range of sizes and colors, are excellent at containing moisture, and can be washed along with the diapers.

### feeling good

The truth is, cloth diapers are an easy, convenient alternative to disposables and a major saver of money, resources, and waste. In her article "Crazy for Cloth" (*Mothering* no. 116, January–February 2003), Laura Schmitt stated that a child will go through an average of 8,000 diaper changes before being potty-trained. At 25¢ a diaper, that comes to \$2,000 spent on disposables.

With so many cloth-diapering choices available, you'll be able to find a style that works for you and your budget. Diaper-service-quality prefolds made in China start at around \$2 each, with covers starting at around \$7. Clearly, even if you spring for the priciest diapers (all-in-ones and pockets can run \$12 to \$24 each), you'll save money in the long run.

Studies comparing the environmental impacts of disposables vs. cloth diapers need to be taken with a grain of salt. The studies are often funded by or otherwise linked to corporations that manufacture disposables, or manage to leave out variables critical to holistically comparing diapering choices. But take a step back

from the inadequate data and think about it:

Cloth diapers directly save thousands of tons of solid waste from ending up in landfills each year, put human waste in sewer or septic systems where it belongs, and require a relatively small amount of water per wash—equivalent to just five flushes of the toilet. Proponents of disposables may argue that washing cloth diapers until your child is potty-trained uses more water and energy than are used to manufacture an equivalent amount of disposables. Take this argument to the trash by using the most resource-efficient washer and drier you can find (or use the free sunshine to dry), or by conserving household water and energy in other ways. After all, you



**Right:** Taking the swim diaper one step further: This little girl is wearing a swimsuit with a built-in swim diaper.

COURTESY OF I PLAY



and a loyal, dedicated group of eco-friendly mothers offering helpful advice and support in online forums and bulletin boards.

MELYSIA HOLIK

aren't about to start using disposable clothes or dishes. [For a thorough discussion and comparison of the environmental impacts of disposable and cloth diapers, see Peggy O'Mara's "A Tale of Two Diapers," in the September–October 2006 issue of *Mothering*, no. 138, and on page 1 of this reprint—Ed.]

I am so glad that I gave cloth diapers a try. I encourage any concerned or interested mother to do the same. It's satisfying to know that I overcame my subconscious, disposable-society, market-driven belief that cloth diapers would be too much of a hassle or too antiquated a system to work for me. Give cloth diapering a try; the only thing you have to lose is more than a ton of household waste per year.

#### WEBSITES

**Motheringdotcommune**—The *Mothering*-sponsored discussion board. A wealth of information and advice on many parenting topics, including cloth diapering. Check out [www.mothering.com/discussions/showthread.php?t=76610](http://www.mothering.com/discussions/showthread.php?t=76610) for help in deciphering commonly used cloth-diapering acronyms and initialisms.

**www.diaperswappers.com**—A valuable site connecting mothers looking to buy or sell used or homemade cloth diapers. Also home to an active forum on cloth diapering and more.



*Lindsay Evans is a stay-at-home mom who lives in rural north central Washington.*

## how many do you need?

Keep these suggestions in mind as you decide how many cloth diapers to buy:

- **Keep track of how many disposable diapers you use in a day.** A good rule of thumb is that you'll need two or three additional cloth diapers per day.
- **Newborns go through many more diaper changes than older babies.** If your baby still poops several times a day, you may need 12 or more diapers and up to 5 covers per day to keep your baby fresh and clean. An older baby may use 8 diapers and 2 covers per day.
- **How often do you do your laundry?** You can get by with fewer diapers if you machine-wash daily, but these diapers will thus get more wear and tear. If the diapers you use will have to be purchased in new sizes as your baby grows, chances are they'll last fine with frequent washings until your baby outgrows them.
- **Diaper covers need to be washed only when they're soiled or smelly;** all-in-one and pocket diapers need to be washed after each use.
- **Cloth diapers don't have to be expensive.** If you make a gradual switch from disposables to cloth, you could slowly buy cloth diapers as your budget allows. This is also a good way to try different diapers to find what works best. You could even try sewing your own diapers; look for patterns and helpful hints on *Mothering's* online forum at [www.mothering.com/discussions/forumdisplay.php?f=319](http://www.mothering.com/discussions/forumdisplay.php?f=319).
- **Be patient!** Don't give up on cloth, even if you have problems at first. From build to bladder size, babies are so different that it might take some experimenting to find the diaper with the right fit. Remarkably, today's diapers and diaper covers are well designed to fit most babies without leaks or blowouts.

—LINDSAY EVANS

**Above:** Going green was never so colorful! Displayed here (from left to right): Blueberry Stuffable AIO; Little Beetles Learners organic cotton training pants; Bummi's Swimmi swim diaper; Hand-Painted Rainbow AIO sewn using AIO Kit from DiaperKit; i play Ultimate Swim Diaper; Snap-EZ Pocket Diaper; Tiny Tush Snap Wrap Diaper Cover; and Blueberry Side Snap Minky Pocket Diaper.

Disposing of human waste in landfills is not just a bad idea, it's *illegal*.

# the **abc**s of going cloth

Tips on everything from prefolds to pockets  
and the rinse cycles in between

B Y E L I Z A B E T H G A W L I K

IT'S THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT and my baby is squalling. I reach into the hamper for another diaper and discover that only two are left. I realize it's time—not to run to the store for diapers, but to do a load of laundry.

I am one of a growing number of parents who use cloth diapers. I chose cloth for a number of reasons, including budget, the environment, and my baby's comfort. I've learned from my experience that cloth diapers can be easier to use than I would have imagined, and can fit into any budget or lifestyle.

When I learned I was pregnant with my first child, I decided to use cloth first because of my concern for the environment. My husband and I recycle and try to produce as little waste as possible, and I knew that using disposable diapers would

dramatically increase the amount of waste we produced. We knew that disposable diapers are a huge contributor to our nation's landfills, and decided we didn't want to add to the pile. In fact, if you had to keep all of your baby's dirty disposable diapers in your house, you'd fill up the house with diapers before your baby was potty-trained.

When I decided to use cloth diapers, I had no idea how many choices were out there. I just went to the largest baby store in town and looked at the few options they had. Only later did I discover the smorgasbord of cloth-diapering products available via the Internet. After some trial and error, I was able to find the best kind of diaper to suit my budget, my lifestyle, and my baby. To save you some time and effort, I've outlined the types of cloth diapers currently available.





## THE DIAPERS

**Prefold diapers:** These may be what come to mind when you think of cloth diapers. They're rectangular, with a thicker layer in the middle and thinner layers on the two sides. Most prefolds can be folded over for young babies, then used unfolded all the way up to potty-training. They range in price from \$2 to \$5 each, and can usually be purchased by the dozen.

Prefolds must be combined with a **diaper cover** (see page 12), of which there are several kinds.



Bummis prefold diaper

**Contour diapers:** These diapers are the next step up in price from prefolds, but they're also a step up in convenience. Like disposables, contour diapers are shaped like an hourglass, and usually have thick padding in the middle. They can be laid directly in a wrap without having to be folded, and can therefore be easier than prefolds to put on a wiggly baby. Contours must be used with one of the types of covers described on page 12, and need to be pinned when used with pull-up pants, bubble wrap, and some wool covers. Due to their shape, you may have to buy two sizes of contours for your baby's diapering lifetime. Prices range from \$6 to \$10 each. *(continued on page 13)*



Kissaluvs contour diaper

# cover story

**Pull-up pants:** In the past, these covers were usually made of plastic, but many advances have been made in recent years. Pull-ups are now often made of polyurethane-laminated cloth, which waterproofs the cloth so that the diapers don't leak through. Prefolds must be pinned in order to be used with pull-ups, and you'll have to buy several sizes as your baby grows. They come in all sorts of colors and patterns, and cost from \$6 to \$15 each.



Bumkins pull-up pants

**Wraps:** These covers feature a waterproof outer layer, and sometimes a cloth inner layer that grips the diaper and keeps it from sliding around. They fasten either with Velcro or a series of adjustable snaps. You can use prefolds without pins: Just fold the diaper in thirds, lay it in the wrap, and fasten with the Velcro or snaps. As with pull-up pants, you'll have to buy several sizes as your baby grows. The cost ranges from \$6 to \$15 each.



Swaddlebees wrap

**Bubble wraps:** These are usually made of polyurethane-laminated cloth and fasten with snaps at the sides. They run big, to allow airflow so the diaper can "breathe." Sizes in this cover style overlap quite a bit, but Smalls should fit most babies for a long time. If your baby fits into a Small for six months, you might be able to skip to a Large and save by not buying Mediums. This will depend on your baby's build: Chubby babies often skip sizes, but skinny babies don't. When used under bubble wraps, prefold diapers must be pinned. \$8 to \$12 each.



Mother-ease bubble wrap

**Wool wraps and pants:** For parents who love natural fibers, wool covers are the way to go, and are available in both wrap and pull-up pants styles. Wool is water-resistant, not waterproof, but these covers are likely to leak only if the diaper is totally saturated, and at that point you'd want to change it anyway. Wool neutralizes urine, and wool covers can be used many more times before washing than other covers can. They need to be washed only every few weeks, or when soiled. However, wool is expensive; these covers cost between \$18 and \$40 each.



Baby Beehind wool wrap

**Wool neutralizes urine,** and wool covers can be used many more times before washing than other covers can.

## THE DIAPERS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11)

**Fitted diapers:** These have elasticized waists and legs and fasten with snaps or Velcro. Most fitted diapers come in several sizes; you'll probably need at least two different sizes over your baby's diapering lifetime. Some fitteds, however, can be snapped or folded down to fit newborns, then expanded to fit babies up to potty-training age. Fitteds work well with any of the covers described above; many parents use pull-up pants, which tend to be the least expensive covers. Costing from \$8 to \$20 each, fitted diapers are at the higher end of the price range but can be a great deal in the long run.



Fitted diapers by Kissaluv's and Baby Beehind

**All-in-one diapers:** All-in-ones are the closest cloth option to disposables in terms of fit and ease of use. They consist of a fitted diaper with an attached waterproof layer that serves as a cover, and fasten with Velcro or snaps. Many parents who use prefolds or contours at home use all-in-ones for daycare, outings, or babysitters. Even die-hard users of disposables don't have problems using a one-piece cloth diaper that fastens with Velcro the same way a disposable fastens with tape. Although all-in-ones sell for \$10 to \$25, in the long run the cost isn't as much as it seems because covers aren't required.



Mum's Bums all-in-one diaper

**Pocket diapers:** The latest advance in cloth diapers, pocket diapers consist of a waterproof outer layer and a soft inner layer, often of microfleece. These are sewn together along the edges, leaving an opening in the front or back. To complete the diaper, you insert in the pocket anything absorbent: a hand towel, a prefold diaper, or one of a number of specially made inserts. Once the insert is in, pocket diapers work like all-in-ones, and close with snaps or Velcro—no additional cover is needed. Moisture passes through the inner fleece layer into the insert, leaving the baby dry. A great advantage to pocket diapers is that you can customize the insert's absorbency, increasing it for night use, naps, or heavy wetters. Many parents who use other kinds of cloth diapers during the day—even disposables—use pockets as their nighttime system. They average \$15 each.



Blueberry pocket diaper

When my baby was born, I used prefold diapers with Velcro wraps because they seemed to be the best value while still being easy to use. These worked great when my baby was a newborn, but as he grew older and we were more often on the go, I looked for an easier option. After trying a few different kinds, I settled on pocket diapers. One reason was that the prefolds I'd already purchased worked well as pocket inserts, so that initial investment wasn't wasted. Because our baby was almost big enough for the largest size of pocket diaper, we bought a stock of those, then continued to use prefolds and wraps until he grew into them. All of this represented an investment of about \$700; our only additional costs were for detergent and water.



Haute Pockets pocket liner

**Swim diapers:** Your use of cloth diapers needn't stop when you leave dry land—there are many wonderful swim diapers out there, and if you use pocket diapers, you already have a great swim diaper on hand. Just take out the insert, fasten it onto your child (you'll have to secure it a bit more tightly), and you're ready to swim! The purpose of a swim diaper is to hold in poop, not pee. If your pocket diaper does that normally, it should work as a swim diaper.

If you use another system, you can buy a diaper specifically designed for swimming. Most are made of material similar to that used in women's swimsuits and look a little like bikini-style underwear. Some come with snaps on one or both sides for easy removal in case of a bowel movement. Some companies make girls' swim tops to match the swim diapers (see photo at bottom of page 8), and a few also make, for boys, swim shorts with an inner diaper. Reusable swim diapers have become so popular that you may be able to find one at your local baby or department store, or online. Two links for swim diapers: [www.imsevimse.us](http://www.imsevimse.us) and [www.kushies.com](http://www.kushies.com).



Bummis swim diaper



i play swim diaper

**Training pants:** When it comes time to potty train, you can stick with cloth throughout the process. Some people find that their cloth-diapered babies potty-train more easily and earlier than their disposable-diapered peers. Many types of cloth training pants are available. The oldest and most easily found are cotton underwear with a thick absorbent middle panel. If you use these, both you and your child will know right away when accidents occur, which helps some children learn to use the potty more quickly.

If your child takes his time to learn, however, or you don't want to clean up so many messes, there are other options. If you already have large enough pull-up covers on hand, you can use these as extra protection over cotton training pants—an inexpensive system that works well for some. If you're looking for something a little more absorbent, try a **pocket training pant**. Several pocket-diaper companies make stuffable training pants for older children that are designed along the same principles as pocket diapers, but pull up and down easily so your toddler can achieve potty independence, and usually come equipped with snaps for easy removal. One advantage of such pants is that you can stuff them lightly during the day, as your child begins to catch on to using the potty, and more heavily at night for a child who still wets in his sleep or is not motivated to get out of bed.

Finally, there are a number of **waterproof pull-up training pants**. Basically, these are thick cotton underpants and a pull-up cover in one. While these are slightly more absorbent than most cotton training pants and won't allow accidents to leak onto clothes, they look and feel more like underwear.

Additional links for training pants: [www.imsevimse.us](http://www.imsevimse.us), [www.kushies.com](http://www.kushies.com), [www.theecstore.com](http://www.theecstore.com), and [www.snap-ez.com](http://www.snap-ez.com).



Little Beetle training pants



Happy Heiny's pocket trainers



Bummis pull-up training pants

Some people find that their cloth-diapered babies **potty-train more easily** and earlier than their disposable-diapered peers.

# PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

PHOTO COURTESY OF BLUEBERRY DIAPERS

I've found that it's best to have 30 diapers on hand for my baby. This allows me to wash every three-and-a-half days and still have a few clean diapers left for baby to wear while I'm doing the laundry. If you want to do wash only about twice a week, you'll need anywhere from two to three dozen diapers. Because you can usually reuse covers several times a day, you'll need only six to eight covers, and even fewer if they're wool.

Diapers can be stored in any kind of covered pail until wash day. (I use an empty kitty-litter pail.) Most diapers get clean with a short soak or pre-rinse and a normal wash; use the same detergent you use with all of your baby's clothes. You can cut down on stains by laying your diapers out in the sun to dry. Or, if using an electric dryer, set on High (prefolds, contours, most fitteds) or Low (all-in-ones,

pockets). If you can do a load of laundry, you can wash cloth diapers.

Now that you've been introduced to the world of cloth diapers, what's stopping you? Go do some exploring and shopping. Even if you decide to use cloth only at home and stick with disposables for trips and outings, you'll be doing your pocketbook, your baby, and your planet a big favor.



*Beth Gawlik is a wife, mother, and freelance writer who lives in Lexington, Kentucky. When she's not busy chasing after her toddler, she enjoys playing with her four cats, writing fiction for older children, and reading everything from juvenile fiction to scientific studies, with lots of picture books in between.*

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### Companies

Baby Bunz & Co., 800.676.4559, [www.babybunz.com](http://www.babybunz.com)  
BabyKicks, 202.558.6161, [www.babykicks.com](http://www.babykicks.com)  
Baby's Abode, 866.422.2263, [www.babysabode.com](http://www.babysabode.com)  
Babyworks, 800.422.2910, [www.babyworks.com](http://www.babyworks.com)  
Barefoot Baby, 800.735.2082, [www.barefootbaby.com](http://www.barefootbaby.com)  
Birdie's Room, 866.624.7343, [www.birdiesroom.com](http://www.birdiesroom.com)  
Blue Penguin, 888.422.2945, [www.bluepenguin.biz](http://www.bluepenguin.biz)  
bum Genius, 888.332.2243, [www.bumgenius.com](http://www.bumgenius.com)  
Bummis, 888.828.6647, [www.bummis.com](http://www.bummis.com)  
Crickett's Diapers, 804.598.8901, [www.crickettsdiapers.com](http://www.crickettsdiapers.com)  
Diapering Decisions, 888.806.9999, [www.diaperingdecisions.com](http://www.diaperingdecisions.com)  
Earthy Birthy Mama, 866.EBM.KIDS, [www.earthybirmamama.com](http://www.earthybirmamama.com)  
EcoBaby Canada, 403.381.0179, [www.ecobabycanada.com](http://www.ecobabycanada.com)  
Ecobaby Organics/Pure-Rest, 800.596.7450, [www.ecobaby.com](http://www.ecobaby.com)  
Everything Birth, Inc., 800.370.1683, [www.everythingbirth.com](http://www.everythingbirth.com)  
Evolution Diapers, [customerservice@evolutiondiapers.com](mailto:customerservice@evolutiondiapers.com), [www.evolutiondiapers.com](http://www.evolutiondiapers.com)  
Happy Heiny's and Stacinator, 619.258.6867, [www.happyheynys.com](http://www.happyheynys.com)  
i play, 800.254.9236, [www.iplaybabywear.com](http://www.iplaybabywear.com)  
Jillian's Drawers, LLC, 800.516.2991, [www.jilliansdrawers.com](http://www.jilliansdrawers.com)  
Lil Diaper Depot LLC, 866.417.4949, [www.lildiaperdepot.com](http://www.lildiaperdepot.com)  
Little Sprouts, [www.littlesproutsdiapers.com](http://www.littlesproutsdiapers.com)

Maine Cloth Diaper Co., 866.586.6232, <http://maineclothdiaper.com>  
Montana's Diaper Store/Natural Baby Company, 877.899.BABY, [www.thenaturalbabyco.com](http://www.thenaturalbabyco.com)  
Mother of Eden/Fuzzi Bunz, 337.367.7671, [www.fuzzibunz.com](http://www.fuzzibunz.com)  
Nicki's Diapers, 866.843.6348, [www.nickisdipers.com](http://www.nickisdipers.com)  
Not Your Mama's Cloth Diapers, 765.398.0708, [www.notyourmamasclothdiapers.com](http://www.notyourmamasclothdiapers.com)  
Precious Dignity.com, 614.376.3686, [www.preciousdignity.com](http://www.preciousdignity.com)  
Punkin-Butt, 503.638.0600, [www.punkinbutt.com](http://www.punkinbutt.com)  
Rogue Natural Living, 541.592.3828, [www.roguenaturalliving.com](http://www.roguenaturalliving.com)  
Snap-EZ Inc., [www.snap-ez.com](http://www.snap-ez.com)  
Snooty Booty Diapers, 540.890.1327, [www.snootybootydiapers.com](http://www.snootybootydiapers.com)  
Softbums, [www.softbums.com](http://www.softbums.com)  
Sun Seedlings, [www.sunseedlings.com](http://www.sunseedlings.com)  
Swaddlebees, 888.838.7987, [www.swaddlebees.com](http://www.swaddlebees.com)  
Tiny Tots, 800.794.5437, [www.tinytots.com](http://www.tinytots.com)  
Tiny Tush LLC, 608.356.2500, [www.tinytush.com](http://www.tinytush.com)  
Vermont Diaper Company, 802.262.6016, [www.vermontdiapercompany.com](http://www.vermontdiapercompany.com)  
Wee Little Sprouts, 877.GO.TO.WLS, [www.weelittlesprouts.com](http://www.weelittlesprouts.com)  
Wildflower Diapers, 888.677.3228, [www.wildflowerdiapers.com](http://www.wildflowerdiapers.com)

### Organizations

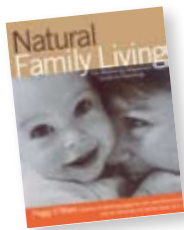
Canadian Reusable Diaper Association, [www.canadianreusablediaperassociation.org](http://www.canadianreusablediaperassociation.org)  
Real Diaper Association, [www.realdiaperassociation.org](http://www.realdiaperassociation.org)

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