

Going Cloth

Changing the world,
one nappy at a time!

By Jannine Barron



Of the many hours spent researching the safest and best value equipment for your baby, how much time have you spent on researching nappies? Nappies will be against your baby's skin almost 24 hours a day for the next few years. What do you use?

Ask a mother who uses cloth nappies why she does so and she will tell you they are easy, cheap and environmentally friendly. Cloth nappy users feel empowered that they are doing the best for their baby and our environment. On the other hand, it is hard to find a parent using disposables who doesn't express some guilt about using them.

In the next few pages we will tell you why cloth nappies are a great choice, how contemporary designs are making the switch to cloth easy, why disposable nappies do harm our environment and how you can save thousands of dollars and feel empowered by switching to cloth nappies.

Why use cloth nappies

When you are well organised and set up with a great cloth nappy system, it is really easy and efficient. Many parents start out using cloth but without proper support and advice find the system unsustainable. If you are in a social circle where few mothers use cloth, you may feel isolated. We hope this article helps you spread the news about why cloth nappies can be easy and are good for all of us. Parents used cloth nappies successfully for centuries because they supported each other with tips and advice, this advice is getting harder to find.

If you use cloth now, you probably notice that a lot of people express their guilt about using disposables but don't know where to go for help about cloth options nor how convenient they are. If you know how to use cloth well, you can help others.

Cloth nappies are much cheaper than disposables. I have estimated that parents spend about \$3500-4000 on nappies for one child from birth.

Cloth nappies can be a healthier option for your baby. Many parents find that babies have less nappy rash. Considering the advertising campaigns from disposable companies you may find this hard to believe! I deal with customers all the time who cannot use disposables due to the rash they cause in babies. Cotton nappies mean your baby's skin can breathe.

Cloth nappies are a responsible environmental choice. You can make your own detergents or purchase earth-friendly brands to wash them in, thereby not contributing bleaches or chemicals to our water table in the washing process.

It takes thousands of gallons of water, paper from our trees and bleach and chemical absorbers to make disposables look white, clean and fresh when you pull them out of a packet.

What are your cloth nappy options?

1 Fitted cloth nappies

These nappies look like disposables; they have gathered elastic at the legs and use Velcro or snap closures. Velcro, snap, or pull on nappy covers can be used with fitted nappies. No folding or pinning is required.

2 Square terry towelling nappies

have been used successfully for centuries — you just need to know how to fold it effectively! They don't need to restrict babies' legs or leak as some people think. I am still grateful to my midwife who showed me some great tips which I now pass on to other parents. If you are a midwife involved in pre-natal and post-natal education, let your customers know about these great tips.

3 Flannelette square nappies

folded the same as terry nappies and need pins or a quality nappy cover to hold them in place. Great for newborns when they are tiny as they are not bulky.

4 Muslin nappies:

Same benefits as flannelette and they make great nappy liners or wipe cloths when you no longer use them as nappies.

Some nappy covers are now designed to hold terry towelling, muslin or flannelette nappies in a rectangle pad shape, reducing the need for folding or using clips. This is a really convenient way to use cloth nappies.

5 Nappy liners If you can't stand the idea of washing pooey nappies, nappy liners are wonderful! Cloth ones are cheaper and keep baby's bum really dry and help prevent nappy rash. Disposable ones cannot be thrown down the toilet, they will clog your system unless you get a biodegradable brand and then they are brilliant and mean you never have to scrape the poo.

6 Nappy covers need to be breathable and not bulky. Try a few out until you find one you like. Avoid PVC and plastic, baby's skin will not breathe in these fabrics.

It's fun to experiment with different ways of folding nappies. After all, you have 2 - 3 years of nappying ahead of you, have some fun by trying different methods. You will soon find one that suits you the best.

Disposable nappies: use and disposal

Every mainstream parenting magazine is full of disposable nappy companies with big budgets telling you how great their nappies are with cute photos of babies looking very clean and happy. Even front cover shots of babies have them wearing disposables. Dolls you buy in toy shops now come with disposable nappies included. We don't have the big budgets that these nappy companies have but we do have a great network of people who are keen to share this information. Use this information as a discussion point amongst friends, parenting groups, midwives. Please note that much of our statistical information comes from the USA or Britain as these are the only countries that have completed studies on the issue of nappies that we are aware of.

Many hospitals offer disposables to parents now for new babies. Mothers are not being trained in the benefits of cloth from the beginning. It is optional not compulsory to be shown how to use cloth nappies. Ask your midwife to cover nappy folding as part of your pre-natal education.

Keep these points in mind when considering disposables of any kind:

- Disposable swimmers were introduced in 1997. I remember because I had just had my first baby. I didn't think they would be popular; it seemed like such a ridiculous idea to me. Looking at the financial cost, one summer swimming every day could cost you \$70 and all the waste. One pair of washable swimmers will cost you \$19.95 and last for one full year. Cute colours and great advertising campaigns make them popular.

- The 'Less nappy changes' theory is often dangerous as there is more likelihood that children will be carrying a heavy load around with a very wet nappy and gels can break through and touch their skin quicker. The effect of these gels on skin is still unknown.

- Disposables have only been used on such a wide scale for 8 – 10 years now. They started to take off in the 1980s but only became widespread with massive advertising campaigns in the nineties. We haven't used them long enough as a society to fully understand their impact on our environment. But after 40 years, we have worked out that it is a major problem coming — let's not wait until it gets to that point!



Pictured: Mathew from Morayfield with their two-year-old daughter.

Mathew and Anita Gray take their nappy composting seriously. This is what they discovered when deciding to be responsible for all their nappy waste. 'We decided to try to compost the standard disposable nappies she wore each night, rather than just bin them. We would rip them open and dump them in the compost bin, and each time we turned the compost, I turned the nappies too. We found that we had huge numbers of worms attacking the nappies, but even when they had been in there for a year, there was still a lot left over. You can see from this pile that you end up with lots of bits of dirty plastic, but we did man-

age to generate a lot of good compost (note garden in background). The biggest problem is making sure the nappy contents have broken down completely — the water/air exposure has to be just right. Which it most likely never will be at the local garbage tip. Too dry, it does nothing, too wet, anaerobic decomposition, not pleasant.'

'We estimate that this pile of plastic is one year of one nappy per night.'

Why use disposables?

The ease, the convenience ... no one can dispute it. They are only as popular as they are because they have filled a need for parents. But a little bit of thought and education (as we hopefully demonstrate on this page) can change this situation around.

- They are convenient.
- They save time, they are effective (some brands) and you have less nappy changes — fitted cloth nappies offer the same benefits. (They also create a huge amount of waste, they stink and are contributing to a major environmental disaster.)
- Less laundry. (Disposing of them in plastic bags makes their biodegradability even longer.)

If you are using disposables, here are some things you can do to reduce waste and health hazards.

- 1 Use a cloth liner next to their skin to prevent contact with gels in the nappy.
- 2 Dispose of faeces in the toilet before throwing away the nappy.
- 3 Take responsibility for the rubbish you are creating and dispose of them on your own property if you have one.
- 4 Use a compostable disposable nappy with no plastic outers that won't break down.

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What you need to buy

Full-time Square Cloth Nappies

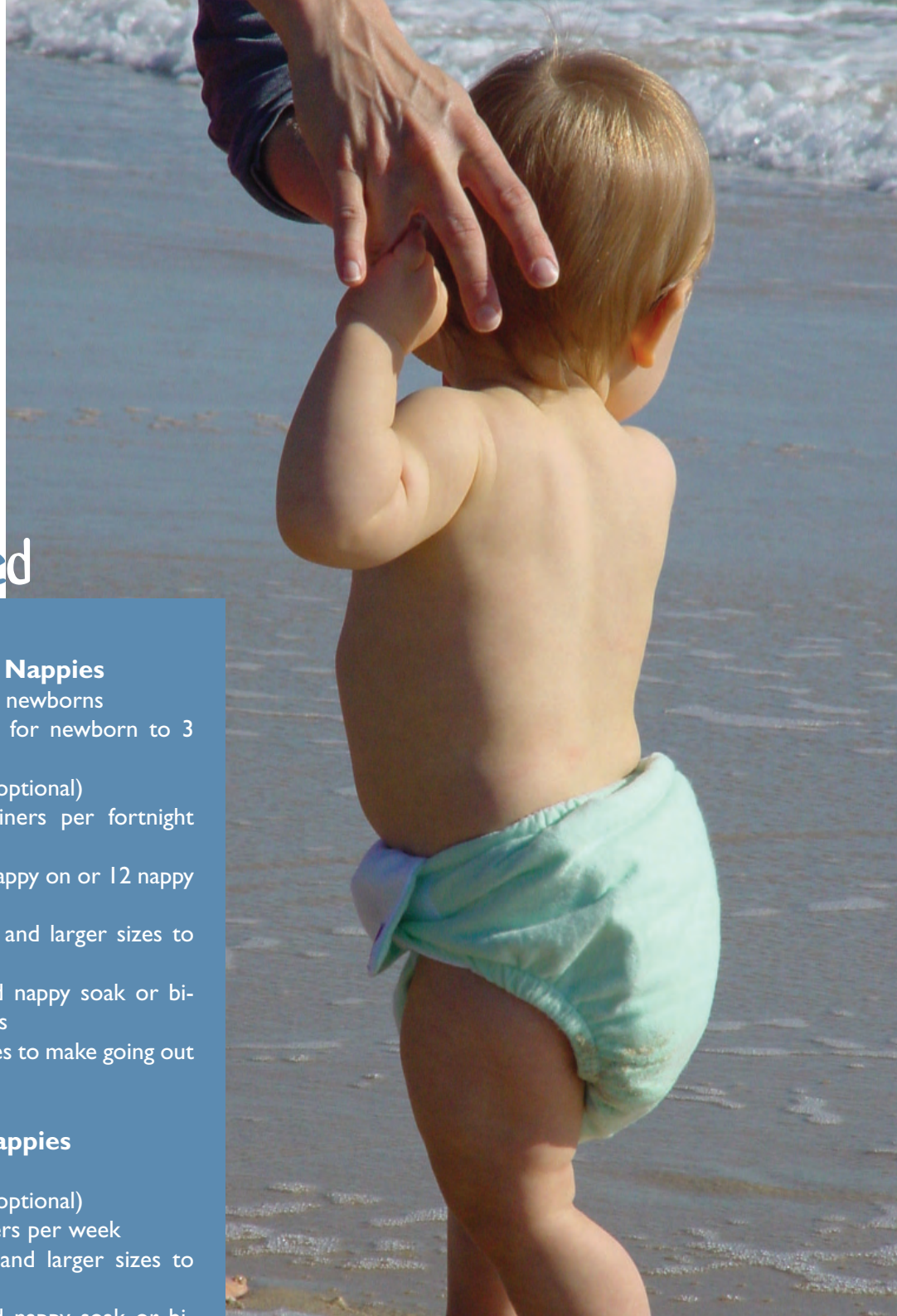
- 12 Muslin or flannelette for newborns
 - 24 Terry towelling nappies for newborn to 3 yrs
 - 12 - 24 cloth nappy liners (optional)
 - 50 biodegradable nappy liners per fortnight (optional)
 - 3 Snappy closures to hold nappy on or 12 nappy pins
 - 12 nappy covers; newborn and larger sizes to grow into
- earth-friendly detergents and nappy soak or bi-carb, vinegar and essential oils
- Optional: 6 fitted-cloth nappies to make going out trips easier

Full-time fitted-cloth nappies

- 24 nappies
 - 12 - 24 cloth nappy liners (optional)
 - 50 biodegradable nappy liners per week
 - 6 nappy covers; newborn and larger sizes to grow into
- earth-friendly detergents and nappy soak or bi-carb, vinegar and essential oils

Nappy Wipes

- Use re-usable nappy wipes. Ones made from terry towelling or flannelette are ideal.
- Cotton wool balls from your supermarket are safe if you need a disposable on occasions.
- Packaged nappy wipes can be handy in emergencies but are an expensive on-going cost to use full-time and the ingredients are not ideal to be using regularly on babies' skin. Skin is an organ that absorbs everything.



Photography by Christabelle Baranay