

Babies' bums

Many new parents want to give cloth nappies a go, but are bamboozled by the options. Navigating the modern nappy industry raises even more questions. First-time mum **Amie Richardson** investigates

I've always considered myself green-minded, if not completely green-living. I recycle, I turn off lights, I walk. I'm vegetarian. I plant trees and pick up rubbish. I know what my carbon footprint looks like.

So when it came to having a baby, I couldn't imagine covering its tiny, brand-new bottom with a plastic, gel-filled nappy that would contribute to the ever-growing mountain of disposables going to landfill every year. Current figures suggest disposable nappies make up about two percent of New Zealand's total landfill waste—that's around 296 million nappies a year, according to Huggies.

But at the same time, I'm no zealot. Sharp pins and freshly laundered nappies did not arouse a nostalgic picture of a simple life: it sounded like hard work. Then there were the doubters, telling me that reusable nappies are just as bad for the environment as disposables, when you weigh up the energy, water and detergents used to wash them.

For a few years, one high-profile report backed them up: the UK government's Environment Agency-commissioned 2004 lifecycle assessment found "little or nothing to choose between" the global warming

impact of cloth nappies and disposables. But when that report was updated last year, the Agency concluded that "it is consumers' behaviour after purchase that determines most of the impacts from reusable nappies". Depending on how they're laundered, the study found that reusable nappies could have 38 percent less impact than disposables—or an amazing 81 percent more, if nappies were always washed at 90°C and tumble-dried (see good.net.nz/2/nappies).

This enormous variation was reported by *The Sunday Times* as showing that reusable nappies did more damage than disposables, unless parents adopted an "extreme approach to laundering them". This supposedly extreme approach includes hanging nappies outside to dry, washing full loads in temperatures not exceeding 60°C and using them on other children. Extreme? Sounds like common sense to me. With this approach, reusable nappies win out against disposables by a clothesline length.

There are other factors in favour of cloth nappies: New Zealand's electricity is generated from a much higher percentage of renewable sources than Britain's, and washing can be reduced by choosing



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modern fitted nappies with an outer that can withstand a few uses when the soiled inner is changed.

The fact is, parents can significantly reduce the environmental impact of reusables by laundering them efficiently. But, as former Green MP Nandor Tanczos points out, “the impact of disposables is more or less fixed, and can only be addressed by reducing the possibly million or so disposables landfilled every day in New Zealand”.

It's funny. That my mother would use cloth on me was never questioned. But just a few years later, most of my cousins were in disposables. A generation's knowledge of cloth nappy use has been lost—and the idea of going back terrifies many. You wonder if you can handle the reality of cloth nappies: the muckiness, the smell, and what to do when you leave the safety of your own laundry.

On the bright side, we're closer to nappy nirvana than ever before. Great fabrics and fantastic new designs mean it's almost as easy for the increasing numbers of new parents opting to use cloth nappies as it is for those choosing disposables. The modern cloth nappy comes in four different styles (see page 52), within which are an infinite array of brands, including those claiming to be one size fits all—the nappy growing as baby does, from newborn to toddler. You can even try making your own (see www.thenappynetwork.org.nz/diy.php). This suddenly burgeoning industry is very different from when Charity Stuart set up Honey Child nappies nine years ago. Charity believes choosing a nappy system is as important a decision as buying a cot or buggy. I tend to agree.

Financially, using cloth makes sense, even if the initial outlay is high. Consumer NZ puts the average cost of using disposables until your baby is two-and-a-half at \$4,100. For reusables, the cost varies from \$700 for traditional cloth nappies, \$1,500 for mid-price all-in-ones, up to around \$2,200 for 24 fitted nappies in two sizes. This price includes washing nappies, using a tumble-dryer in autumn and winter, and doesn't take into account savings made by buying in bulk. I reckon around 12 good-quality pocket or fitted nappies in each size (washing every other day) will do—and helped by a good Kiwi

wind, you can still dry outside in the cooler months and save even more.

Buying quality matters with nappies. It's best to try a few before dishing out \$30 or even \$45 on one nappy that you might not like. Most of the best brands have trial packs available—a great way to begin. If you live in Dunedin, Waitakere or Hamilton, your council may subsidise nappies or even offer them free.

Where to start? Prefolded, fitted, all-in-one ... each style of cloth nappy has particular benefits. Prefolds are excellent to start with. They're cheap to set up, and with inners are perfect for changing a newborn every couple of hours. But as your baby grows, other styles become easier to manage. With a rather wriggly seven-month-old, prefolds can be a bit fiddly and, depending on the brand, are not always fail-safe. For nights, try a fitted nappy with cover or a quality pocket nappy (with booster inserts and a merino cover or 'onesie' over the top). Pocket nappies or all-in-ones are fantastic when you're out or for day care—though some facilities won't use them.

Snazzipants director Pippa Jinks estimates that just one in four of her customers' day care facilities agrees to use cloth nappies. This stance can often be changed if parents demand the service and teach facilities that a laundry or a bucket is unnecessary. With a flushable liner and a bag for the soiled nappy, it's almost as easy to change a reusable as it is a disposable.

Don't beat yourself up if you do need to use disposables at day care, or for the first few weeks—or even months—after your child's born. After an emergency Caesarean section, I wasn't about to start hanging out cloth nappies. It took me a full six weeks to recover enough to begin, and even now I sometimes use disposables at nights or when we go out of town. With a bunch of eco-options available, from corn to biodegradable nappies, and composting initiatives supported by big brands like Huggies, disposables are a good option when you need them.

But for every cloth nappy I use, one less disposable goes to landfill—and there is something infinitely satisfying about seeing rows of multi-coloured pockets, bamboo velour, and prefolds drying on the clothesline.

Amie Richardson



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Modern cloth nappies



Prefolds with cover

Inner pad absorbs wetness while waterproof outer keeps baby dry.

Cost: \$3–\$6 per nappy; \$10–\$34 per cover

Brands available:

Real Nappies

Ecobots

Snazzipants ✓

Pros: Economical way to start with cloth nappies. A good quality overnap won't need to be washed as much as it may last several uses.

Cons: Can be fiddly to use, especially when baby gets more mobile. Outer dries quickly but inner is slower.

Amie's pick: Ecobots. Provided the nappy is fitted correctly, the double leg-guard and elastic around the back make it virtually leak proof. Extra absorbency through the middle of the cotton inserts.

Fitted nappy with cover

Fitted style nappy with separate outer covers.

Cost: \$25–\$34 per nappy; \$10–\$34 per cover

Brands available:

Tot Bots

Popolini

Snazzipants ✓

Nap Naps ✓

Karma Kidz ✓

Busy Behinds ✓

Baby First

Pros: Easy to use, relatively leak-proof when fitted correctly with extra outer cover. Nice fabrics available.

Cons: Slow drying.

Amie's pick: Tots Bots FlexiTots. Whenever I put my son in this nappy, I felt as if he was going to a 70s disco. It was a great fit and the bamboo velour was soft against his skin and surprisingly easy to clean. Even better, the cover didn't always need changing.

Pocket nappy with insert

Waterproof outer layer with stay-dry liner and opening for an absorbent inner pad.

Cost: \$28–\$45 (includes inners)

Brands available:

Honey Child

Peapods

Ecobubs

Haute Pockets

Busy Behinds ✓

Karma Kidz ✓

Nudey! Rudey! ✓

Yoyo Nappy ✓

Harmony Pocket Naps ✓

Happy Heinys

Fuzzibunz

Tots Bots

Bum Genius

Pros: Easy to use, fast drying, good for nights with extra inners.

Cons: Massive differences between some of the brands—some leaked every time I used them despite refitting.

Amie's pick: Honey Child. A fantastic New Zealand-made nappy. Absorbent, a great fit, and my husband's favourite nappy overall. Good resale value.

All-in-one nappy

Designed with waterproof and absorbent layers sewn together.

Cost: \$25–\$45

Brands available:

Bum Genius

Snazzipants ✓

Nap Naps ✓

Karma Kidz ✓

Tots Bots

Pros: Easy to use—just put on and go.

Cons: Not great for nights. Can take longer to dry.

Amie's pick: Snazzipants. Very easy to use. Fantastic fit with nice touches like wide elastic waistband to stop leaks and tag perfectly positioned to distract baby during changes.

Tested

Not tested

✓ **Made in NZ**

Baby wipes

Reusables, like Cheeky Wipes (www.cheekywipes.co.nz), are a good choice. Bamboo wipes are produced more sustainably than cotton: try the Little Genie brand.

Balm and massage

I like Tui Balm for the nappy area and Made4Baby's massage oil for all-over skin care. Paraben-free, containing oils like almond, rosehip and avocado, it's nice for Mum too!

Washing

Always follow the manufacturer's instructions. It's best to keep microfleece nappies in a bucket (or tote bag) with a couple of drops of tea tree oil until you have enough for a load. Investing in a Honey Child Nappy Sprayer (or equivalent) takes much of the hard work out of cleaning nappies. Drying nappies outside is best: the sun works as an antiseptic and bleaching agent.



We have ten packs of Little Genie Bamboo Baby Wipes to give away. See good.net.nz/competitions to enter



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