

Cloth Diapering 101 by MyPreciousKid.com

What do I need to get started?

First decide your commitment level to cloth diapering. Do you want to try out a few things while maintaining a backup supply of disposables, or do you want to cloth diaper full-time?

Part-time cloth diapering

12 or so diapers (or diapering systems) are a good beginning if you are experimenting with cloth diapering. It allows you to diaper for a full day or two and have a moderate load of diapers to wash, but you will need to supplement with disposables at this level. Feel free to try different kinds to get a feel for what works best for your day-to-day diapering needs and what seems to fit your child best. If you decide to switch to full-time cloth diapering, you'll need a larger stash.

Full-time cloth diapering

Minimum of 24 diapers, 6-8 covers, one (two is best) pail liners and a wet/dry bag for the diaper bag. More diapers give more leeway before laundering. Less diapers makes it likely that you won't continue with cloth.

Kay's Suggested Starter Pack: 6 covers, 12 pre-folds or inserts, 12 pockets, 1 pail liner, 1 wet bag, diaper sprayer

Diaper Types

Flats - these look like old fashioned kitchen towels and must be folded down in various ways to use on your child. They can be pinned, placed in a cover, or added as doublers to other diapering systems. These are easy to find, but not many people actually use them.

Pre-folds (also called Chinese pre-folds) - this is probably what you think of when you think cloth diapers. These are thick, fluffy cotton that has been folded and sewn so all you have to do is fold them in thirds to use them. They can be pinned or just folded and placed inside covers. This is the most economical way to cloth diaper. 24 pre-folds and 8 covers is a good low-budget workhorse diapering system.

Fitted diapers - these are also cotton except they have elastic at the legs and look like disposables only in cloth. They are more expensive than pre-folds, go on like a disposable, and require a cover. The elastic at the legs, coupled with gussets in the cover, will keep almost all poop in. This is especially exciting if you have a newborn that is blowing out of pre-folds on a regular basis.

Pocket diapers / AI2 - these are a diaper with a cover built on. The diaper has an opening where you can slip an insert which provides your absorbency. When changing the diaper, both the insert and diaper are thrown in the wash. When assembled beforehand, these make diapering very easy—one step rather than a diaper and cover. The pocket also allows for adding more inserts for overnight or other heavy wetting times. These are often handy for babysitters or fathers who may not be as enthusiastic as you are about diapering!

AIO's (All-In-Ones) – as the name implies, this is a diaper and cover built together, though unlike a pocket, you don't have to stuff the insert yourself. The most like disposable diapers and also frequently the most expensive diapering system.

Questions:

Q: Which diapers do you recommend?

A: It seems each cloth diapering family has their own favorites and preferences may even change from child to child. Sometimes you have to try several things to figure out what works for you.

Q: Do I have to use a cover?

A: If your diaper is only fabric (cotton, fleece, etc.), it will become saturated and leak everywhere without a cover. Some diapers have a cover “built in” to them. Those diapers will have fabric on the inside and some sort of waterproof material on the outside. A cover is not needed for these diapers.

Q: Will my supplies work for multiple babies?

A: It depends. Of course things like dry bags and pail liners are a one-time investment. A baby using a cover for a year or more will most likely wear that cover out, especially one fastened with a plix (hook and loop). Also, covers washed with the diapers tend to take more of a beating. Depending on the quality of the diaper, it may last for two years or more, but most likely you are going to need to refresh at least some of your supply for a second child. The exception is for sizes that your baby does stay long in.

Q: Can I cloth diaper a newborn?

A: Definitely. However, there are two things that make newborns tricky. First, they are so tiny. One-size diapers are NOT for newborns, no matter what they say on their advertisement. You will need specific newborn diapers until your child is 8-10 lbs. or a few months old. Depending on the type of diapers you choose, this cost can really add up compared to disposables. On the other hand, these diapers are easily re-used so if you plan on having multiple children you will reap a cost savings. Also, breastfed newborns tend to poop often and excessively and so it helps to have diapers with good elastic at the legs. It is easy to be turned off from cloth diapering when you are dealing with blow-outs all day. When cloth diapered properly, you should have far LESS blow-outs than disposables!

Q: Can I cloth diaper when I am about and about?

A: It is easier than you think—simply keep a cloth diaper or two in your diaper bag and a dry/wet bag for carrying home the wet diaper. Be sure to throw the used diaper in your pail when you return home.

Q: What about traveling?

A: It is one thing to stash a wet diaper or two in your diaper bag and quite another to bring your stash of 24-30 diapers with you and try to find a place to launder them. Most parents that cloth diaper use disposables for an extended vacation. Another alternative is covers with compostable (or throw away) liners.

Q: What about nights?

A: For nights you need to add absorbency—which means using thicker diapers, more diapers, or adding a doubler. It is also very important to have a good fitting cover for nights or else you will find that your baby leaks and wakes up wet. Many also swear by wool covers for night time. The Bamboo/Hemp inserts/doublers are more likely to hold nighttime wetness. Others skip cloth diapers and just use a disposable for night. It is certainly possible to find a cloth diapering system that you enjoy for nights. Experiment with a few different things to find what works for you and your baby.

Q: My baby is wet!

A: Unless you are using a fleece or other liner that wicks moisture away, your baby will be wet when you change them. Most babies really don't care. As long as they are changed on a regular basis, having wet against their skin will not lead to diaper rash or other problems. If your diaper is "leaking" you are doing something wrong. Not covering it sufficiently (and it is wicking out) or not changing often enough are the biggest culprits.

Q: How often do I need to change cloth diapers?

A: It depends on the absorbency of the diapers. Two to three hours is a good rule of thumb. Every two hours is a good target and occasionally going three should be fine. Four hours is really too much. You will not mind changing more often because you are not paying out twenty-five cents for every diaper you use!

Q: What about diaper rash?

A: Cloth diaper babies rarely get diaper rashes. If your baby needs some sort of barrier or ointment on their bottom, you must use a layer of fleece or flannel between your baby and the diaper. The residue from those creams will cause your diapers to lose their absorbency.

Washing

A dry diaper pail system—a large kitchen garbage pail with a pail liner—works nicely when cloth diapering. Simply place your diapers in there and wash when it gets full or when you run out of diapers (remember to keep a few back for use when washing!). When the pail is full, carry your liner to the washer and turn it upside down to empty it and throw in the bag as well. You won't need to touch any soiled diapers! It helps to have a spare bag to use while one is washing. Breast milk poop doesn't need to be washed out—it comes right out in the washing machine—but once you start solids or formula, you'll need to wash feces out in the toilet. There are many ways—just swishing, using a portable sprayer, etc. One nice, cheap solution is to repurpose an old spatula to scoop the majority of it, flush, and then swish and wring out by hand in the new water. Of course with a sprayer, you don't have to touch anything. The diapers actually get a cold water soak in the diaper pail and usually come out spotless! Unfortunately, dealing with solid poop is the worst part of cloth diapering!

One way to wash cloth diapers uses three wash cycles. The **first** is a cold wash normal cycle with detergent. Some do this without detergent, but either way it rinses out the diapers and lets them soak for a while which is an important step. A top-loading washer with a moderately full diaper pail probably needs to be set on "large load." You want to make sure there is enough water to cover the diapers and to soak them well. The **second** cycle is a sanitizing cycle on hot. Use the "extra soil" setting for this. Use detergent and an oxygen cleaner for extra sterilization. Your **final** cycle will either be an additional rinse or a complete run-through on another setting like "light." You do not use detergent on this cycle—the idea is to rinse.

Detergents: You need to wash diapers in detergents free of phosphates, dyes, and fragrances. There are many to choose from, but considering doing all of your laundry with the same detergent to avoid build-ups of dyes and fragrances inside your machine that will transfer themselves to your diapers, even if you wash your diapers with separate detergent. The AMOUNT of detergent you use is also critically important. Usually half a scoop is all that is needed. Too much detergent causes a red bottom on baby. Open your washer and peek in during the final rinse. If you see suds, try again with less detergent. The amount of detergent needed will vary based on your detergent, washer, and size of your load. Start with half of the recommended amount and tweak it from there. If you wash a smaller than usual amount of diapers, decrease your detergent.

Kay's Suggestion: Rockin Green or BumGenius (Country Save) Detergents work well!