

Babies and sustainable living

Nappies

There has been fierce debate about the impacts of a parent's choice of nappy on the environment. Given the amount of time that a child will spend in nappies it is a very important decision.

Disposable nappies create pollutants, require huge amounts of water and energy during their manufacturing and are a significant burden on landfills. There are also health and environmental concerns associated with disposing of untreated raw sewage.

Biodegradable nappies have similar initial impacts as traditional disposables, but are often made using fewer harsh chemicals and synthetic materials. They also significantly reduce the quantity of waste in landfill if allowed to aerobically decompose.

Cloth nappies

Cloth nappies are generally made of cotton, which is a water intensive crop. Their manufacturing process also has negative side effects. A major advantage of using cloth nappies, however, is that their main environmental impact comes during their use rather than as part of the manufacturing process. This allows parents to control their in-use impact by implementing a gentle and efficient washing regime.

Another significant benefit of cloth nappies is that the same 20–40 nappies can be reused for the entire nappy wearing period of the child. Once a child is potty-trained, the nappies can be passed on to other children. This durability means that the effects of their original production are insignificant in comparison to the countless

disposables used during the same period. Cloth nappies are available in many styles from the traditional terry towelling squares to fitted nappies with Velcro or snap closures.

Nappy liners

Liners are not essential, but they do make cleaning up easier, help prevent staining and some liner fabrics keep baby drier, which can prevent nappy rash. Make your own, by simply cutting material (flannelette, microfiber or fleece work well) into a rectangular shape to fit onto folded nappy.

Nappy wipes

Cut your own wipes from old or new cotton or flannelette. Wet before use and wash before reuse. Cotton wool or unbleached toilet paper can be used as a relatively low impact disposable wipe in times of need and the white and blue disposable wipes can actually be washed and reused (with care) countless times.

Nappy covers

Nappy covers or pilchers make cloth napping much easier as they help keep clothes dry and replace the need for pinning. Also snappies are a good alternative to pins as you only need a few and they are quite safe to use. Try to use fabric that will still allow baby's skin to breathe.

Soaking cloth nappies

Wet method: Fill your nappy bucket about a quarter full with cold water; add half a cup of baking soda and vinegar and a drop of eucalyptus or tea tree oil, or an environmentally friendly pre-wash soak. Remove any solid matter and toss nappy into bucket.

Dry method: Sprinkle some baking soda in your nappy bucket. It is optional to add a few drops of



eucalyptus, lavender or tea tree as well. Remove any solid matter, run cold water over the nappy to remove any stains and toss in the bucket. If necessary, pre-soak in machine with a half cup of baking soda or your favourite earth-friendly detergent in cold water for about an hour in cold water before normal cycle.

Washing cloth nappies

Boiling is the traditional way of washing and sterilizing traditional nappies (e.g. terries). Done regularly it may reduce the life of the nappy so is not generally recommended by manufacturers. Washing nappies in hot water uses a considerable amount of electricity and, therefore has a significant environmental impact. Cold washing works fine and when combined with sun drying is the most environmentally friendly way to get clean and healthy nappies for your baby. Choose detergent which is phosphorus-free to reduce the impact on the environment. Put vinegar in fabric softener dispenser or rinse cycle if you feel it is necessary.

Drying cloth nappies

Sunshine will deodorize, sanitise and naturally bleach nappies. On rainy days they can be line dried indoors. Most nappies can also be tumble dried, but results in significant energy usage – look for energy efficient appliances. Choosing a nappy that will dry quickly will reduce the requirement for a drier and will therefore use less energy resources.

Sun protection

Baby's skin will be very sensitive to ultra-violet rays from the sun, so it is important to protect them as much as possible.

A good sun hat is essential. Also light clothing that covers arms and legs can greatly reduce sun exposure. Some companies even produce clothing

and blankets with extra UV protection in the material.

Most sunscreen lotions contain harsh chemicals, but there are some more natural alternatives available, such as UV Natural-Baby.

Nappy balm, lotion and powders

Various natural commercial products exist. Lucas' Pawpaw ointment is readily available from most chemists and is very gentle. Be sure to read packages and try to avoid fragrances and other additives which may irritate baby's skin. Calendula and/or lavender flowers dried and infused in mild oil is soothing to inflamed skin.

Powder will help absorb excess moisture to prevent nappy rash. Many commercial varieties contain talc, which should be avoided. Arrowroot and Maize Starch are both effective gentle powders and can have a small amount of lavender or other soothing essential oils added to them.

Nappy rash

Nappies should be changed as soon as they are wet or dirty. Some doctors recommend changing every 2 hours, at least during the day, especially if there is a rash.

Clean the whole nappy area with a damp cloth to remove urine/faeces at each change. Avoid perfume and alcohol-laden baby wipes.

Allow the baby to have nappy free time every day and ensure the nappy area is completely dry before putting a clean nappy on.

Do not use excessive amounts of washing detergent, soap or nappy sanitizer.

Use a nappy liner, which keeps moisture away from baby's bottom.



Apply a natural balm or lotion to protect baby's skin. Powder will help absorb excess moisture to prevent nappy rash.

Food

Breast milk is incredibly environmentally friendly – no packaging or energy used in preparation. Convenience and health benefits also make this the best option, if possible. If breastfeeding is not an option, organic formulas are available from organic retailers around Tasmania.

Save money and excess packaging by making your own baby food. Puree organic fruit, vegetables, legumes and grains in varying combinations. Ice cube trays can be used to freeze food in small portions for later use. Try to buy local produce whenever possible to reduce transportation and support local growers.

Transport

Having a baby does not mean that you are suddenly confined to car travel. Most babies love walking around town being pushed in a pram or carried in a backpack. Prams and other baby accessories can be rented or bought second-hand, allowing multiple children to reuse the same item.

Bus rides generally are just as entertaining, with different people to look at and interact with and children under 5 travel free.

Cyclists can also continue to ride with children riding in a trailer or seat on the back of the bicycle. Contact Bicycle Tasmania at info@biketas.org.au for advice about cycling with young children.

Activities

There are lots of things to do with baby around Tasmania. Children are usually amazed by tree bark, flowers and other plants. Take baby for a

walk in the Botanic Gardens or on one of our beautiful walking tracks. Be sure to stop and allow baby to examine textures, smells and colours up close.

Playgroup Tasmania facilitates playgroups throughout Tasmania. If there is not one in your area, they will help you to start one.

Various classes exist for babies, from post-natal yoga to music classes and infant aquatics. Most charge a term or session fee. The PCYC has a range of inexpensive classes for all ages from rocket tots (0–3yrs) to martial arts and gymnastics. See www.pcyctas.org for more information and schedules.

Toys

Choose toys made of natural materials, such as wood and cloth. Ensure that all paints and materials used are non-toxic. Avoid plastics where possible as they are made from petrochemicals and may contain PVC or other harmful materials.

Most babies are often more intrigued by a jar filled with rice, a cupboard full of pots and pans or your key ring than any toy you can buy. Make baby safe toys by reusing items around your house. Play dough is always a hit with toddlers and preschoolers. An easy, natural recipe is provided at the end of this sheet.

Playgroup Tasmania has centres and toy libraries in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie, which lend out all sorts of toys and games for a small fee. Sharing toys in this way reduces the materials needed to produce them and cuts down on the waste produced in their manufacturing. Incidentally, it also saves you from ending up with piles of unused toys!

Another option is to source second-hand toys from one of the many op shops around. When your child is finished with the toy, return it to the op shop to continue the recycling process.



Homemade play dough

You will need:

- 3 cups flour (combine brown rice flour and maize flour to make it gluten free)
- 1.5 cups salt
- 6 tsp cream of tartar
- 3 tbsp oil
- 3 cups chamomile tea
- Optional: flowers, sand, turmeric, essential oils, etc. for colour, texture and scent

Directions:

1. Dissolve salt in tea
2. Pour all ingredients in a large pot
3. Stir constantly over med heat until ball forms, pulling away from sides
4. Knead the dough mixture until smooth
5. Add any extra colours, scents, textures, etc
6. Store in an airtight container and remoisten if it begins to dry out.

Clothes

Babies grow quickly during their first year. Buy or borrow clothes second-hand and pass them on again once your child has outgrown them.

Freecycle (www.freecycle.org) is a website devoted to the free exchange of goods. Members list unwanted items that are available for collection or post descriptions of wanted items. Groups exist all over the world and are free to join online.

There is an increasing selection of organic and fair-trade clothing available for children. Clothes made of organic cotton, hemp or bamboo are

generally more sustainable choices. Though usually more expensive, you can be confident that the social and environmental impacts of their production has been minimised.

More information

Playgroup Tasmania – State Office
www.playgroupaustralia.com.au
1800 171 882

It's a Kid's Life! Hobart – Fun activities for Kids, Information for Parents, by Wendy Nielsen and Avril Priem

Suppliers

EcoHaven

Large range of organic and fair trade clothing for babies and kids. Also stocks cloth nappies and other baby products.

71 Murray Street, Hobart, (03) 6234 6454
www.ecohaven.com.au

Lyrebird Steiner Products Tasmania

Assortment of Steiner-inspired toys and gifts made from natural materials.

259 Liverpool Street, Hobart, (03) 6231 1433
steinerproducts.com.au

Zappy Nappy

Fitted cloth nappies, covers, and complete kits
www.zappynappy.com.au

Mother Goose Baby Shop

Rents baby gear, including hammocks and prams.
Shop 9/23 Westside Circle, Kingston, (03) 6229 1800

www.mothersgoosebabyshop.com.au

Hire for Baby

Rents baby capsules, prams, etc.

Hobart: (03) 6245 1096; Launceston: (03) 9028 8993

www.hireforbaby.com