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# The Diaper Dilemma:

*Cloth vs. Disposable, which is better for you and the environment?*

By Melissa Taylor

You've picked a low-VOC paint for the nursery, decided to make your own babyfood, and registered for the organic cotton onsies. Now you are battling with the diaper dilemma. Which should you use - cloth or disposable?

Choosing the right diaper is based on a combination of factors including environmental impact, money and convenience. The more you know about what matters to you, the better informed your choices will be.

## Environmental Impact

During the diaper-wearing days, a child averages 8 diapers per day for about 2 ½ years, or around 7,000 diapers from birth to potty training. While it may seem that cloth diapers are better for the environment because they don't wallow in the landfills, washing them does require the use of detergents and valuable resources such as water and electricity. But wash them right and their impact lowers. In addition, the selection of "greener" disposable diapers is growing.



## Cost and Convenience

The cost of your diaper is another important factor. The total cost of disposable diapers for one child can range from \$1,500 to \$3,000, depending on the diaper you choose. Compare this with a set of cloth diapers which costs between \$500 and \$1,500. Add in the laundry costs of detergent, water and electricity of \$200 to \$440, bringing the total estimated cost of cloth diapers to between \$700 and \$1,940.

Although cloth diapers could come out slightly cheaper, convenience trumps cost for many busy parents. Disposables are lighter to carry and can be tossed in a trashcan. Many child care centers require the use of disposables, so for working parents disposables may be a necessity. Cloth diapers can't be tossed and if you're

not at home, the dirty diapers must be carried home in a waterproof bag. It really comes down to what is best for your lifestyle.

## Cloth Diapers

"Once I started using cloth diapers, I was hooked," says Denver mom Jenn Stephens. "I felt like I was doing my part to reduce the amount of trash going into the landfills; and I was so happy to learn that it really wasn't that much extra work. I have since passed on my diapers to two friends, one of whom is using them right now so they have lasted through three babies. That's a lot of dirty disposable diapers that we've kept out of the landfill."

Eco-Politan, an environmental baby store in Lakewood is stocked floor to ceiling with colorful cloth diapers in pink checked floral, zebra patterns, and ocean creatures – diapers that look more like chic purses than diapers. Not only are these colorful cloth options aesthetically appealing, they don't require the use of safety pins or plastic pants.

Instead of plastic pants, hipster diaper covers are available to protect a cloth diaper from leaking. These covers are made of waterproof materials like ultra-soft cotton and fleece. But not all cloth diapers require this diaper cover. The all-in-one and the pocket style diaper include a waterproof exterior fabric on the diaper. Plus, these diapers are adjustable for a baby's growth. While the all-in-one diaper has an inner absorbent soaker sewn in, the pocket diaper allows for an absorbent soaker pad to be inserted within the diaper's layers.

For the greenest use of cloth diapers, cloth diaper manufacturer FuzziBunz Diaper Company suggests parents use a front load HE washing machine, do only full loads with environmentally friendly laundry soap and air-dry the diapers.



If washing cloth diapers at temperatures of less than 140 degrees, hanging to dry, and reusing on a second child, a 2008 British study by the Environment Agency found that the environmental impact of cloth diapers is less than disposables.

### Eco Disposable Diapers

Cloth diapers don't work into every family's lifestyle, so many "greener" disposable options are popping up. "I wanted to do cloth diapers, but couldn't get the hubby on board," says Whitney Trujillo, a Colorado mom of two-year-old Oscar. "Then I got comfortable with both Seventh Generation and Earth's Best diapers which are both relatively environmentally friendly."

Many parents cringe thinking about their baby's disposable diapers sitting in a landfill. Perhaps that's why more environmentally friendly disposable diapers are providing parents with "greener"

options. Earth's Best, TenderCare Plus, Tushies, Nature Babycare and Seventh Generation all make disposable diapers with the intent on being more environmentally friendly - either by emitting less toxins during production, not using bleach in the diaper itself or by being biodegradable or compostable.

Another new disposable option is the hybrid gDiaper, a disposable diaper with a flushable liner insert. The diaper gets tossed but the wet or dirty insert gets flushed. This addresses the growing environmental concern that diapers filled with human waste will leach and contaminate ground water when thrown in a landfill.

Diapers are an important decision. Explore the many diapering options with their benefits and challenges and you'll be able to make the best decision for your family. ♦



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