

Southwark's Real Nappy Campaign

Real nappies – an introduction

A real nappy usually consists of a number of layers. The cloth nappy itself provides the absorbency, and the outer wrap (pant) provides the waterproof layer. On some nappies, this may be a single combined "all in one", like a disposable is.

A washable or flushable liner is used inside the nappy, which acts as a barrier to catch any solids. At night, booster pads can be added to provide extra absorbency, so that the nappy will last 12-14 hours without a change. This is just a pad of terry or flannelette, effectively an extension of the nappy.

Benefits of real nappies

Cost

Parents are often unaware that they could save hundreds of pounds by using real nappies, compared with disposables. An initial outlay is needed but this is a one off payment and it means parents are not paying for single use disposables on a weekly basis. Veolia Environmental Services Southwark's real nappy discount voucher (requested through the Real Nappies for London scheme) can help reduce the initial outlay required when purchasing real nappies.

The Women's Environment Network estimate that savings from using home laundered nappies for a first child alone could amount to between £500 - £700. The potential cost savings are even greater if the nappies are used for subsequent children. There is also a second hand market for real nappies, which can help reduce the cost of your nappies further.

Washing nappies at home is the cheapest option. The cost of real nappies is variable but using the traditional terry nappies or a flat pre-fold nappy are excellent for those on a budget. Nappy laundry services are available for around £8 - 10 per week and are therefore a comparable cost to disposables. Laundry services provide extra convenience to parents.



The environment

It is estimated that around 8 million disposable nappies are thrown away every day in the UK. The majority of these nappies end up in holes in the ground called landfill sites and once there, it is unknown how long it takes for disposable nappies to fully decompose. What is known is that as waste starts to break down in landfill sites, it releases methane, which is a greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change.

WRAP (the Government's Waste and Resources Action Programme) have calculated that households which use real nappies can reduce their household waste by up to half compared with households that use disposable nappies.

For parents

Anecdotal evidence suggests that children who use real nappies potty train faster than those in disposable nappies as the child is more conscious that he / she is wet or has recently been to the toilet.

In 2006, three nurseries in Southwark started using a real nappy laundry service. Within a week of using real nappies, a large number of the children had potty trained.

For babies

Most cloth nappies are made from natural, breathable materials that are soft next to children's skin and do not contain any chemicals or gels.



Frequently asked questions

Q Where can I get real nappies from?

- Initially for good advice and variety try one of your local real nappy agents, who are more often than not parents who have used real nappies on their children. Speaking to someone with first hand experience is invaluable. There are a number of local real nappy agents listed at the end of this document.
- Well-known supermarkets and retailers now stock various real nappy brands.
- The internet is also a good source of new and second hand real nappies.
- Some agents and internet based nappy companies can also offer trial packs, so you can try real nappies before committing to them.

Q What about washing and drying real nappies?

- Real nappies don't need to be sluiced, boiled, scrubbed, soaked or machine washed at 95°C.
- Simply place them in a separate laundry container and wash at 40-60°C along with other whites.
- Biodegradable nappy liners can be flushed down the loo with any solid waste. Washable liners can go in the wash with your nappies.
- Modern home washing machines wash so well that real nappies do not have to be sterilised.
- Most real nappies can be line or tumble dried or simply placed on an airer in a warm room to dry.
- Different types of nappies will suit different circumstances. For example, flat nappies, such as terry squares or pre-folds, are good for households with limited drying facilities whereas some of the shaped nappies are easier to use but can take longer to dry.

Q How does the laundry service work?

- Local nappy laundries offer weekly services that collect used nappies and provide a fresh supply, laundered to the highest standards, for the next seven days.
- Laundry services offer convenience to parents and are a comparable cost to disposable nappies.
- The laundry service will provide a bin, in which to store soiled nappies.
- Bins are collected from participating households on a regular basis, usually weekly, and washing of real nappies is carried out by the experts.
- Two laundry services operate in Southwark: Bumblebuds and Number One for Nappies (details at the end of this document).

Q What do I need to get started?

There is no hard and fast rule but generally parents will need the following:

- 15 - 20 nappies
- 4 - 6 wraps in each size (small, medium, large), depending on the age of your baby
- 2 - 6 rolls of flushable liners
- 3 booster pads for night time
- A nappy bucket with a lid for storing soiled nappies at home
- A washable, waterproof bag for trips out

Parents can expect to spend between £80 - £350, depending on the type of nappies they choose. This is compared to an estimated cost of between £600 - £900 for disposable nappies (depending on brand).

Q Won't my baby get nappy rash?

Babies are no more or less likely to get nappy rash from real nappies than from disposables. Frequency of nappy changing is the important factor to avoid nappy rash.

Q Do they leak?

It's important to select the right size for the individual baby's shape to avoid leakages. There is a wide choice of products available, of all styles, shapes and sizes. Booster pads can be used to increase absorbency if needed e.g. for overnight.