

Nappy washing guide

The following information is a collaboration between nappy libraries, retailers, manufacturers, distributors and nappy organisations. These are general guidelines only; they apply to most brands and types of nappies. However, you must check the labels/instructions on your own nappies to ensure that they can be washed like this - some may be especially delicate. The UK Nappy Network accepts no responsibility for your results!

General info

Everyone has different ways of washing nappies as they adapt their washing routine to their own machine and water type. People in a hard water area will probably need to use more detergent than in a soft water area. Those with more modern machines may need to select the wash cycle that uses the most water. Sometimes this is called an allergy setting or a super wash, but do check the washing machine instructions to make sure that the temperature will be suitable for nappies. Another option is to pour a jug of water in on top of the nappies before starting the wash. Do not be tempted to add extra water through the drawer during the cycle as this can unbalance and possibly damage the machine.

A basic washing routine

A guideline for a basic washing routine is generally agreed to be as follows:

- Cold rinse in machine (removes and breaks up solids, loosens stains)
- Use your usual non-bio detergent (the enzymes in biological detergents can damage bamboo)
- Start with the recommended dose of detergent on the pack then adjust accordingly until you have no suds in the final rinse of the cycle, but at least 3cm suds in the main wash part of the cycle. If you can't achieve this by adjusting the dose of your current detergent, you may want to try a different detergent.
- Do not use any fabric conditioner (coats fibres and prevents proper absorption)
- Wash at either 40 or 60 degrees (60 is recommended for killing germs and thrush)
- Use an intensive wash cycle, not a quick wash or an "eco" setting (nappies need a lot of jiggling around to ensure they are clean AND properly rinsed)
- Cold rinse in machine if unsure whether all detergent has been removed
- If there are any bubbles left after the final rinse you will need to rinse again until they are gone to prevent detergent build up
- Line dry (see below. For faster drying, stand ainer by radiator and set up a small fan blowing gently up the middle. This can cut drying time by more than half)

Always wash at 60 if:

- Your baby is under 3 months
- Your baby has repeated or unusual nappy rash
- Your baby is unwell at all
- You have more than one baby using the nappies



To find your correct detergent dose

If there are any bubbles in the final rinse of the cycle, you will need to rinse again until they are gone, then reduce the detergent dose next time to prevent detergent build up. If you have less than 3cm of suds in the main wash, increase the detergent dose slightly next time. This way, you will find the right amount for your water type and machine.

DO NOT USE: This list of things to avoid with cloth nappies is taken from manufacturers' and retailers' websites.

- Detergents with "cellulase" in the ingredients
- Vinegar
- Calgon
- Any fabric conditioner
- Bleach (apart from where listed as safe)
- Napisan
- "Vanish" and other harsh stain removers
- Oxy-action stain removers
- bumGenius/Cotton Babies specifically say, "Use non-bio washing powder which does not contacting any perfumes, dyes, whiteners, brighteners or enzymes" (It is possible that your warranty could be void if your nappies prematurely degrade and you are found to be using a harsh detergent or something else on the "DO NOT USE" list)

"Cloth-safe" creams

Ideally, if the nappy is changed often enough and skin is allowed to air dry as much as possible, rashes will be reduced anyway. Any cream with paraffin or petroleum-based ingredients is generally a certain no.

We would always recommend using a liner with creams regardless as there is no guarantee that a cream won't cause trouble for various reasons. Always rub creams in well and use sparingly to reduce the likelihood of problems. Disposable liners can cause nappy rash because they stay damp against the skin, so trying fleece liners is a good start. Silk liners and silver liners are also said to be better for rashes (silver is well known to have healing properties).

This is a list of creams etc that are generally agreed to be okay for cloth, providing they are used sparingly and rubbed in well:

- Angel Baby Botty Balm
- Arbonne Baby range of products
- Badger Balm (questionable)
- Balmy Notions
- Bio Baby Eco Spray
- Breastmilk
- Burt Bees
- (questionable)California Baby Diaper Rash Cream

- Chamomile tea (NOT chamomile essential oils)
- Cavilon (cream or spray)
- CJ's BUTTer (all variants including tubs, tubes and spritz)
- Coconut oil (solid or cold pressed)
- Eco Sprout Bum Salve
- Lanisoh
- Little Violet's Baby Balm

- Neal's Yards Baby CREAM (NOT baby balm)
- Punkin Butt
- Purepotions Lav Salve
- Sheepish Grins Bottom Balm
- Thirsties Booty Love
- Waitrose Bottom Butter
- Weleda Baby



Hints and Troubleshooting

Using too much detergent on a regular basis can cause a build up in the nappies which can lead to nappy rashes, smelly nappies or nappies that leak. Ensure your washing machine is also cleaned regularly.

You do not need to use a specific powder for your nappies, your usual non-bio detergent should be fine. Start with a full dose and reduce if needed.

Do not use bicarbonate of soda, bleach, vinegar or Napisan as over time they can damage the PUL and elastic in the nappies.

It is not necessary to wash nappies at a higher temperature than 60 and doing so could shorten the life of the nappies. Line dry nappies where possible. It is more hygienic and better for the longevity of the nappies. If you must tumble them check that your nappies are safe to tumble before you do so and never tumble on hot.

Do not dry bamboo on a radiator that is too hot to touch. This will damage the fibres and eventually they will start to fall out (this damage usually looks like a slug has been munching your nappy/booster!) It is best to use an aircer near a radiator.

If nappies are still smelly after washing then initially it may be caused by using too LITTLE detergent or could be caused by a build up of detergent. For either though the solution (a "strip wash") is the same: in a CLEAN washing machine, use a FULL dose of detergent in a 60 wash and then rinse until ALL bubbles have gone.

If this does not solve the problem, soak the nappies in icy cold water for 24 hours and then repeat. Once nappies are stripped, you will need to ensure that you are rinsing all the detergent out every time you wash to prevent the problem reoccurring, and if they then start to smell again then you may need to switch detergents.

If nappies smell strongly of wee when in use, it could be down to "teething wee" which also often causes nappy rash. Charcoal impregnated microfleece reduces acidity and helps with the smell and the rash. You can buy "charcoal bamboo boosters/inserts" which are microfibre wrapped in charcoal impregnated microfleece, or you can buy/make charcoal impregnated microfleece liners.

It is worth noting that hemp nappies can have a strange smell to them and that some detergents leave clothing and nappies unscented which can be odd when first using them as we are so used to detergent scenting our laundry.

If you use a cream and find that your nappies are stained from it (usually grey stains that look like oil residue) Olive Oil Soap is excellent for removing it or soak the nappies in milk then rinse thoroughly by hand until the water runs totally clear, then a rinse cycle in the washing machine, and then a 40 degree wash as usual to ensure all traces of milk are removed from the nappy.

Essential oils

Tea Tree is actually a very harsh oil for skin and should NOT be used on children under 12 years old. Many people use it to sanitise nappies but actually the quantity needed to effectively fully cleanse is way more than anyone would ever use. Quite a bit of skin redness issues can be put down to the use of Tea Tree in the nappy bucket or wash.

Lavender can be used neat on skin and is considered to be safe for babies and young children (a VERY small percentage of people are sensitive to it though so it should always be patch tested) but it does sting a lot on broken skin, so a few drops in water is fine for wipes. It can be added to the wash as an antimicrobial additive. There is a common misconception that lavender is relaxing. It is, but only in very small quantities. In larger quantities, it is stimulating so if you use lavender and find that your baby stops sleeping, that is probably why!

Chamomile is added to nearly every baby product these days as it is generally very gentle and safe to use with children.

However, in the last 10 years there has been a huge increase in the number of children with eczema, which does correlate to the increased use of chamomile.

Aromatherapists would generally recommend avoiding chamomile oil unless under supervision for a specific problem. Chamomile tea is not the same as the essential oils and can be a lovely alternative.

Rose is extremely expensive so not often used, but is considered to be safe for use with babies.

Mandarin is not expensive and, diluted in a base oil, is generally safe for use with babies. Combined with lavender, it enhances the antimicrobial and healing properties, and it also said to be good for digestive health when a few drops in a base oil such as olive oil or grapeseed oil are massaged (clockwise) into the abdomen, but mandarin can stain so use with caution in that respect.

Logic also tells us that using small quantities of any anti-microbial regularly could eventually result in resistant microbes. Tea Tree should only be used under guidance from a qualified aromatherapist.

Information recap!

There is a lot to take in when collecting your kit, so this sheet will recap some of the information and hopefully help you remember the most important bits!

There are photo and video fit guides on this website: www.worcsnas.org.uk and the FAQ section is very extensive. You are also welcome to email, PM, text or phone with any questions during, and after, your trial. We're here to help! Our "NI Cloth Bums" Facebook group is also a great place to ask questions and meet other local parents using cloth nappies <https://www.facebook.com/groups/464803743549596/>



Parts

All nappies generally have a waterproof outer, an absorbent layer, and then something to keep the skin dry and/or catch poo. So below is a guide to each part and how it may appear in your kit:

Waterproof outer (aka PUL) - this may be attached to the main part of the nappy as an all-in-one, or it may be separate, whereby it is called a "wrap" or sometimes "coverall". When it is separate, you can wipe it clean and reuse it.

Absorbent layer - This will either be in the form of a shaped or "fitted" nappy when separate from the "wrap", or in the form of "inserts" or "boosters", which are essentially both the same thing - a strip of absorbent material. For a recap on types of material see below.

When using an all-in-one nappy, or a fitted nappy, you can add additional boosters to "boost" the absorbency. When using a "pocket" nappy, the inserts/boosters are stuffed inside the "pocket". Sometimes the boosters/ inserts snap into the outer with poppers. These are often called "snap-in" nappies

Lining - Some nappies, usually all-in-one and pocket types, have a stay-dry layer/lining built in. If not, you will want to add your own. (Usually people prefer to add a liner to catch poo even if the nappy already has a built in stay-dry lining, as it makes poo disposal easier) Your kit comes with washable "fleece liners" made of microfleece, and a pack or roll of "disposable liners" (which often claim to be flushable but the sewage companies would prefer that you don't flush them). Microfleece stays dry against the skin, whereas disposable liners often sit wet against the skin and can cause nappy rash. Very occasionally children are sensitive to microfleece. If you think this is happening you could try suede cloth or silk as a stay-dry liner.

Materials

Hemp (looks similar to jersey cotton, usually greyish, soft when new but goes stiff and firm over time) - Absorbs fast, dries slowly, holds loads, most eco-friendly material, more expensive than bamboo etc.

Bamboo towelling (usually beige or yellowish, small looped fibres often shiny) - Absorbs slowly, dries slowly, holds a large amount, fairly eco-friendly as quick growing before processing into rayon. Easily damaged by dry heat which gives it a 'slug-eaten' appearance over time.

Cotton (usually in the form of a 'prefold') - Absorbs fast, dries fairly fast, holds a medium amount, not very eco-friendly to produce, prefolds often free in preloved groups/freecycle, or very cheap.

Charcoal (dark grey microfleece) - Often called 'Charcoal bamboo inserts', these are charcoal microfleece, usually wrapped around a microfibre inner. The microfleece is impregnated with nanoparticles of charcoal derived from bamboo (i.e bamboo is burned down to charcoal then crushed) during manufacture. Charcoal absorbs smells and reduces acidity so lessens teething rash. No more absorbent than microfibre on its own but the fleece outer can reduce compression leaks.

Microfibre (usually white or greyish, has a sticky feel to it) - ~Dries fast, holds only a small amount and easily squashed out like a sponge, man-made, usually very cheap. Can be uncomfortable and drying if directly against baby's skin.

Bamboo fleece (beige or yellowish, smooth fuzzy feel, not shiny) - Absorbs medium time, dries fairly fast, holds a large amount, fairly eco-friendly as above.

There are also two other commonly used materials that are very similar to each other but which function totally differently. Minky, and Bamboo Velour. Both are extremely soft and can come in any colour.

Minky has a longer pile than bamboo velour and is made of polyester so is not absorbent and is very quick drying. It's usually used as a cheap soft outer for pocket and all-in-one nappies.

Bamboo velour has a shorter pile and is made of bamboo rayon. It is extremely absorbent so can take quite a while to dry. Like bamboo towelling, it is easily damaged by dry heat, so if you can't hold your hand against the heat source, it's too hot for bamboo!