

# SWITCH YOUR THINKING'S

GUIDE TO



# MODERN CLOTH NAPPIES



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your thinking

A project funded by the state government  
and administered by the Waste Authority



*Switch your thinking is a local government sustainability initiative developed by the City of Armadale, the City of Gosnells and the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale*

This project is funded by the State Government through the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Account, and administered by the Waste Authority.



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# WHAT IS A MODERN CLOTH NAPPY?

MODERN CLOTH NAPPIES ARE:



SHAPED



WASHABLE



FITTED



REUSABLE

Typically made from fabrics such as cotton, microfibre, hemp or bamboo, they are the same shape as a disposable nappy and most fasten using press studs or Velcro.

They are easy to put on and don't require pins, soaking or bleaching.



WHY USE REUSABLE NAPPIES INSTEAD OF DISPOSABLE NAPPIES?

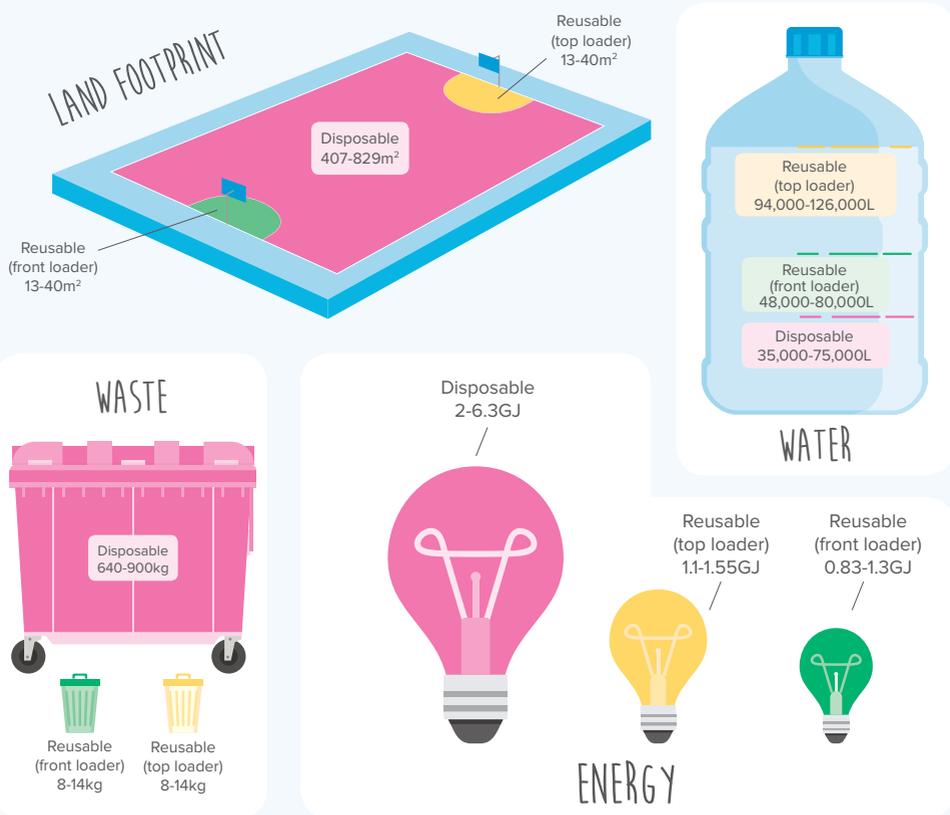
# HELP THE ENVIRONMENT

Most people consider reusable nappies because they feel it is better for the environment. **But how do we know this is true? Does the extra washing required outweigh the environmental benefits of reduced waste?** We can find the answers to these questions using a process called Life Cycle Assessment. This is a detailed study that assesses the range of environmental impacts over the entire life cycle of a product from mining and extraction of the materials through to processing, transport, use and disposal.

There has been a major study of the life cycle environmental impacts of disposable vs reusable nappies in Australia. The results of this study are presented below. The results assume the reusable nappies are washed at home, on a cold cycle<sup>1</sup>, line dried and used for one child<sup>2</sup>.

## Environmental Impact<sup>3</sup>

Reusable nappies vs Disposable nappies for one child



The environmental impact can be reduced further by using the nappies for 2 or more children. Washing using solar energy from household solar panels, a solar hot water system or using rainwater will also minimise the environmental impact.

The study concluded that disposable and reusable nappies are comparable for energy and water use but the reusable nappies have significantly less land footprint and waste.

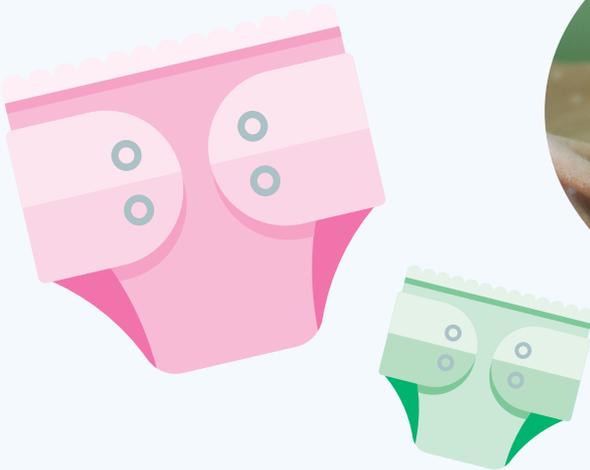
## SAVE MONEY

A comparison of costs for disposables vs modern cloth nappies found that the cost of disposables for one child is on average approximately **\$3,000** and the cost for one child using modern cloth nappies is approximately **\$900**, saving approximately **\$2,100**. If the reusable nappies are sourced or sold second hand or used for a second child the cost savings are even greater.<sup>4</sup>



## THEY'RE CUTE

Modern cloth nappies and their accessories come in all sorts of styles and patterns!



<sup>1</sup> Since this study was completed it has been established that it is better for the longevity of modern cloth nappies to wash them on a warm wash. This will increase the energy use but also increase the amount of time the nappies can be used for.

<sup>2</sup> The study uses terry towelling flats with a plastic picher as the reusable option. This would roughly approximate the materials used in most modern cloth nappies.

<sup>3</sup> Results taken from - O'Brien et al (2009) Life Cycle Assessment: Reusable and Disposable Nappies in Australia, School of Engineering, The University of Queensland, Brisbane.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Darlings Down Under, The Cost of Cloth, [www.darlingsdownunder.com.au/the-cost-of-cloth.htm](http://www.darlingsdownunder.com.au/the-cost-of-cloth.htm)

# TYPES OF MODERN CLOTH NAPPIES

There are many different types of modern cloth nappies.



## SIZED AND UNSIZED

Some modern cloth nappies come in specific sizes, others use snaps and velcro to adjust the size of the nappy as baby grows.

Sized nappies may fit better, especially on newborns, but one-size nappies can be used for longer.

## PRE-FOLDS

Fabric rectangles which can be folded and fastened. They are used with a waterproof cover.



## ALL IN ONE

Nappies with absorbent inserts that are permanently attached to the waterproof outer cover.



## ALL IN TWO

Nappies with absorbent inserts which can be removed for washing and drying. These are usually attached with snaps.



## POCKET NAPPIES

The outer cover is waterproof with the inside made of a stay dry synthetic material. The nappy has a pocket in it where an absorbent insert can be placed. Absorbency can be increased with additional absorbent inserts.



## NIGHT NAPPIES

Special nappies with extra absorbency for naps and night time.



## HEMP, COTTON, BAMBOO, MICROFIBRE

The nappies and inserts can be made from a range of materials. Natural materials will generally take longer to dry but may be a better choice if your child is sensitive to synthetic fibres.

Microfibre is excellent at quick absorption but should not be the top absorbent layer as it can irritate the skin. There is also increasing concerns about synthetic materials including microfibre shedding tiny plastic threads into the sewer system which eventually end up polluting the ocean.

The nappy that works best for you will depend on a range of factors including your preferences, your baby's size and shape and how often they need to be changed.

The number of different options can seem overwhelming at first. It can help to borrow or buy a few second hand nappies and experiment with what works best for you before buying a whole set. There are nappy libraries and services available where you can borrow a selection of nappies to try.

# HOW MANY WILL I NEED?

24 nappies should be enough to allow you to wash every second day and have a few spare.

## OTHER EQUIPMENT

You will need a large lidded nappy bucket to keep the nappies in while you accumulate a full load of washing. Using a bucket with holes in the side can help with air circulation and reduce smell.

A waterproof bag (or wet bag) may be useful for storing the dirty nappies in if you intend to use them while out.

If using pre-folds or a nappy that is required to be fastened you will need some nappy fasteners.

A high pressure sprayer (which attaches to the tap in your toilet) can be helpful to remove faeces before putting nappies in the pail.

Some people find it easier to clean the nappy if they use a disposable or reusable liner as the top layer. These can be helpful if you need to use a barrier cream or nappy rash cream as too much cream can damage the nappy. Disposable liners should be placed in the bin and never flushed down the toilet (even if the packet says they are flushable). They are similar to disposable wipes in that they can clog your pipes or those of the local sewage treatment system.

To avoid using disposable baby wipes many people will cut up old clothes into squares and hem them to make cloth wipes (old flannelette pyjamas work well). You could also buy cloth wipes or flannels. If using these while out and about you can bring a small water bottle to wet them before use. These wipes can just be washed with the nappies.



# REUSABLE NAPPY CARE INSTRUCTIONS

1

Remove faeces by tipping into the toilet and then give the nappy a quick rinse. Nappies that are just wet should also be rinsed after use.

2

Fasten any velcro tabs to the laundering tabs. This stops the nappies getting stuck together in the wash.

3

Place in the nappy bucket. Do not soak in water or bleach. This is called dry pailing.

4

When you have a full load (or each evening if they smell) put them in the washing machine and run a rinse or short cycle. Try not to leave them in the pail for more than two days.

5

Wash the nappies according to the washing instructions on the nappy label with your preferred detergent. The recommended amounts for different types of detergents are available here: [cleanclothnappies.com/detergent-index/](http://cleanclothnappies.com/detergent-index/)

You can note your washing instructions and detergent amount below for future reference.

WASH TEMPERATURE:

CYCLE:

DETERGENT AMOUNT:

6

Dry on a washing line if possible. The sunshine helps to deodorise and sanitise the nappies. The nappies can also be dried in a dryer according to the drying instructions on the label.

7

If your nappies become smelly, need to be sanitised, leak or you experience other problems refer to: [cleanclothnappies.com/what-to-strip-what-to-sanitise/](http://cleanclothnappies.com/what-to-strip-what-to-sanitise/)

*This page can be cut out and stuck on the wall in your laundry for reference.*

# SMELLY ISSUES AND SANITISATION

Sometimes nappies need a deep clean. This may be because they have become smelly, your child may have an infection or you may be purchasing second hand nappies. A “Strip” wash is designed to remove ammonia build up and a “Sanitise” wash is designed to kill microbes.

The method for doing this depends on your washing machine.

Clean Cloth Nappies website has an excellent guide to strip washing and sanitising which is available here - [cleanclothingnappies.com/what-to-strip-what-to-sanitise/](http://cleanclothingnappies.com/what-to-strip-what-to-sanitise/). This site has fact sheets with detailed instructions for different issues and washing machines.

## OUT AND ABOUT

A waterproof bag (or wet bag) can be used to store dirty nappies and wipes while you are out.

## DAYCARE

Some daycares will allow you to supply cloth nappies and some will not. Ask yours what their policy is. If they do support modern cloth nappies they will generally ask you to supply the nappies and a wetbag to take the nappies home in for washing.

## GO PART TIME

You don't have to use modern cloth nappies all the time. Many people use modern cloth nappies at home and disposables while they are out. Others use modern cloth nappies in the day and a disposable nappy at night if their child is wetting through. It's still better for the environment if you use modern cloth nappies part-time rather than not at all.

## BUYING SECOND HAND

There are often modern cloth nappy bargains to be found second hand and this can be a great way to try out different types of nappies inexpensively before buying your own set.

In addition to normal precautions you should take when buying goods second hand, check the nappies for the following;

- Stains and smells
- Stretched and sagging elastics
- Greying of the fabric
- That the outer waterproof layer of the nappy (known as PUL or Polyurethane Laminate) has not cracked or de-laminated (when the plastic layer separates from the fabric layer)

All of these issues indicate the nappies may not have been washed correctly or are nearing the end of their life.

All second hand nappies should be sanitised after purchase.



# OTHER REUSEABLE ITEMS

If you are considering modern cloth nappies you may also like to consider other low waste items in pregnancy and early childhood.

- Reuseable breast pads
- Cloth pads, menstrual underwear and cups
- Reuseable food pouches for food puree and yoghurt
- Joining your local toy library



# SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Australian Nappy Association: Tips for Fitting Cloth Nappies Perfectly  
[www.australiannappyassociation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/ANA-DLE-Flyer-Tips-for-Fitting.pdf](http://www.australiannappyassociation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/ANA-DLE-Flyer-Tips-for-Fitting.pdf)

Choice: How to Buy the Best Disposable and Cloth Nappies  
[www.choice.com.au/babies-and-kids/baby-clothes-and-nappies/nappies/buying-guides/disposable-and-cloth-nappies#Disposable vs cloth](http://www.choice.com.au/babies-and-kids/baby-clothes-and-nappies/nappies/buying-guides/disposable-and-cloth-nappies#Disposable%20vs%20cloth)

Clean Cloth Nappies:  
[cleanclothnappies.com](http://cleanclothnappies.com)

Darlings Down Under – the Cost of Cloth  
[www.darlingsdownunder.com.au/the-cost-of-cloth.htm](http://www.darlingsdownunder.com.au/the-cost-of-cloth.htm)

Kidspot: How to Wash Modern Cloth Nappies

[www.kidspot.com.au/baby/baby-care/nappies-and-bottom-care/how-to-wash-modern-cloth-nappies/news-story/d173767c1a664a871459e3f80e40a895](http://www.kidspot.com.au/baby/baby-care/nappies-and-bottom-care/how-to-wash-modern-cloth-nappies/news-story/d173767c1a664a871459e3f80e40a895)

Life Cycle Assessment: Reusable and Disposable Nappies in Australia  
[pdfs.semanticscholar.org/b062/e7ae6289cdb4ea8998f6fe5276a6a8c96928.pdf](https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/b062/e7ae6289cdb4ea8998f6fe5276a6a8c96928.pdf)

The Cloth Nappy Doctor – Microfleece and Microfibre: How to Identify the Difference  
[clothnappydoctor.com.au/microfleece-and-microfibre-how-to-identify/](http://clothnappydoctor.com.au/microfleece-and-microfibre-how-to-identify/)

The Story of Stuff: The Story of Microfibres  
[storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-microfibers/](http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-microfibers/)

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FOR MORE INFORMATION