

handle a little poop. I'd rather do that than put diapers in the toilet.

- Rice Paper Liners! Put them in the cloth diaper – peel them off if they get messy and flush them. If not, just wash and reuse them. They can withstand several washes.
- When you wash them, first do a rinse with cold water. Wash (heavy cycle usually) with hot water, drest and baking soda. An extra rinse usually satisfied me. I used to bleach them, but stopped that. Stains happen. Hanging them to dry outside in the sun really does whiten them anyway, and for some reason hanging rows of white diapers outside makes me happy anyway.
- Run a diaper pin through your hair before putting it back in the diaper (the oil lubricates it and makes it easier to go through – weird but true.
- Boudreux Butt Paste. Dumb name, tacky label, best diaper rash cream EVER. You used to have to order it, but now it's available everywhere.
- For diaper rash, make sure you dry the bottom before applying cream. Otherwise you just trap moisture in.
- The best rash solution is letting them go naked. That is scary, so we compromise with letting them go around in a loose cloth diaper with no cover. (Closely supervised). This really works well.
- Baby clothes are not designed for cloth diapered bums. You may need to go a size up.
- Cloth diapers also make good burp cloths (if you have a spitter those cute flannel ones will do nothing) or putting them by the baby's face while nursing (so you don't get milk dribbled all on your clothes), or cleaning up potty-training accidents, or changing pads, or...
- We noticed that you can't smell the 'wet' in cloth diapers very much. It's a noticeable difference from disposables.

For disposables, we like the Target brand – they work fine, have been improved over the years even, and are cheap. For toddlers/heavier wetters I like Luvs brand. Huggies and the Costco brand tend to get the little gel crystals on the baby when they're wet. Which is icky and can't be good for them.

### ***The end of diapers: Potty-training:***

Don't be in a rush to use Pull-ups. They are useful (they fit my bigger kids better than hard-to-find size 6's – and we use them for naps/school) but they are essentially diapers. They don't let the child feel wet. Having an accident in real underpants teaches your child faster what it is to be wet.

Get the thicker, absorbent undies – the thin ones do nothing in case of an accident.

Use a timer to remind when it's time to go potty – that way it's the timer's fault, and not yours, that play was interrupted.

Put a vinyl tablecloth on your couch (we put ours under the slipcover so it wasn't as obvious) to protect from accidents.

You don't need an elaborate sticker or reward chart – our kids have been happy with just a sticker stuck wherever they want on a piece of paper.

## **Laundry & Clothes:**

It's worth the money to have 1 or 2 more outfits than you think you 'need', as it will help you to do laundry less often. If you find yourself doing laundry constantly, this may be a good solution.

On the same subject, don't pay a lot for baby clothes, they sometimes only wear a thing once before outgrowing it.

Always keep the next size up in the baby's dresser – you never know when they'll outgrow the current size (i kept the bottom drawer filled with the next size up). Also, try on the next size often, especially as some brands run smaller than others. (we waited too long on one size for Princess and almost had to cut her out (no lie) of this one dress).

Keep storage boxes in the baby's closet to put clothes in as they outgrow them. When it's full, label with the sizes and put away.

In my experience, the Children's Place and Little Me usually run a little small, Land's End usually runs a little big ([www.landsend.com/overstocks](http://www.landsend.com/overstocks) is a great place to get a good deal on quality clothes).

Baby clothes/bedding should be washed separately in Dreft or other baby laundry soap. I only do this for a few months. Unless your baby has really sensitive skin, they should be fine, and it's a lot easier not to have to do baby's laundry separately anymore.

Consider getting a lingerie zipper bag for baby socks/booties/mittens. When you take them off the baby put them directly in the bag, and throw the whole thing in with the wash. Baby socks WILL get lost.

Fastening overall hooks and snapping snaps on outfits will make the baby clothes not so noisy in the dryer.

## **Health/Illness:**

Keep baby Tylenol (and/or Motrin) stocked at all times, and know the dosage your baby can have. Our old pediatrician told us that babies tend to prefer grape-flavored Tylenol. Probably true, my kids liked it a lot (and less likely to stain than the red stuff).

Give your baby a dose of Tylenol about a half-hour before they have their shots. That may be in the Dr's waiting room, so bring it with you.

Johnson's vapor bath and vapor lotion work great (check the label, it may be for 2 or 4 months and up). Like Vapo-rub, but for babies. Keep this on hand.

If you have to give your baby a liquid Rx, get the pharmacist to give you a cork/plug thing for the top – it has a hole to put the baby syringe into and you can invert the bottle to fill the syringe. Again, wish I had found out about these for my first 2!

In case of ear infection, ask the Dr. for a Rx for ear-numbing drops. We went through several infections without them, and when we switched pediatricians discovered the wonders of the ear drops. Life/sleep savers!

station on each floor. Nothing fancy, just a place for supplies and disposal. Plus a changing pad at each place. We've never had a changing table. While it would have been nice on my back sometimes, you can't use them for that long without danger of them falling off anyway. The floor (with a changing pad or cloth diaper underneath) has worked fine for our kids. We used a milk-crate to store diapers/supplies at first, and then got a little diaper cart/organizer.

Unless at a public changing station (ew) I put the changing pad horizontally under the diaper area, as opposed to vertically from head to toe. There's no reason their head has to be on it, unless you have no carpeting, and you don't have to worry about which end was head, and which was bum. Come to think of it, I should have written 'Head' and 'Butt' or something on the ends of our changing pads - for the public changing station scene. Anyway, placing the pad horizontally gives you a place to put the dirty diaper instead of on your carpet while you finish the change, until you can put it in the pail/bag. This is especially important with cloth diapers. 'Lap pads' also make great changing pads and are very washable.

I love cloth diapers. I love putting my babies in soft, cotton diapers. We used them nearly exclusively with Princess (not for church, really long outings, long naps (very infrequent with that kid) and vacations), most of the time with Thomas, and... not at all with Monkey. Had our life been a little less crazy when Monkey came along we would have, though. It's really not hard, I just had enough to think about at that point. I think it amounted to an extra load of laundry every few days.

### ***Here's some cloth diaper tips:***

- Use all-cotton diapers. Most diapers you can buy in the store have polyfil batting in the middle. That's not very absorbent. The best place I found (as of 2003 when I ordered the last set) was weebies.com. We ordered the Chinese prefolds as well as *nylon* diaper covers. Do not get vinyl ones, they don't breath at all. Don't bleach or machine-dry the covers. We tried the Velcro covers instead of pins, but they were a big pain and leaked more. Pins work great.
- You need a diaper pail. Put wet diapers in it.
- Shake off excess poop into toilet before putting messy diapers in the pail. I used to soak them in the toilet (with the 'diaper duck' – a special hook for soaking diapers) but then came to my senses. Washing machines can

## Diapers:

You do not need a diaper genie. They are expensive, tricky to use, still smell, and bad for the environment.

A regular diaper pail is hard to find nowadays, though. I did find one, and have used it separately, for both cloth and disposable diapers.

You also don't need a wipes warmer, although I have to say that had I been given one I would have used it when the babies were small... probably. Sometimes just holding a wipe in your hand for a minute warms it enough so that it's not shockingly cold for newborns.

I buy Costco wipes. I like to take them out of the packaging and put them in a more sturdy wipes container though. When I do that, I flip the wipes upside down, so that what was down (and is more wet than the top) is now the top, and vice versa. Otherwise the wipes at the bottom are sopping wet by the time you use them.

You can make your own wipes, but I'm not convinced that that's better or cheaper. My sister-in-law changed her baby on the bathroom counter, and just used washcloths and warm water from the sink. That seems ideal. You could wash the cloths with the diapers.

Keeping a roll of toilet paper with your diaper supplies can save you on wipes. Clean the baby with toilet paper first, and a wipe to get really clean. Some diapers this will work better with than others...

Wipes can be cut/ripped in half. This saves money on wipes and is especially useful for newborns, who are so small they just need little wipes anyway.

Newborn diapers don't really smell. When the stools get more solid, the best thing to do is shake it off into the toilet, and throw the diaper into the trash. We have tried several things, including a small grocery bag right inside the garage door (by the current changing station) or a small (bathroom sized) trashcan. Just empty it often, which is a good thing anyway. Really smelly diapers go directly to the dumpster or trash can (or at least outside :).

If you live in more than one level, you'll probably need a diaper-changing

Remember 'Tummy Time'! When they're awake, put them on their tummy for a few minutes at a time to help them gain neck and back strength. Big Head kids (like mine) may hate this, so you'll have to keep them entertained. Prop up a board book so they can see it, or talk and play with them. We even found a Tummy Time Playset that had a mirror at the right angle for a baby to see themselves. Roll up a receiving blanket to put under their arms for support. Sometimes rubbing their lower back helps as well.

## Feeding:

If breastfeeding, you are supposed to alternate which breast you start with. Sometimes it's hard to tell. I've heard of people using safety pins on their bra – they put it on the one they should start with and switch it when the feeding is done.

Don't rush to solid foods. It used to be that 6 months was the norm for starting on cereal, and now it's about 4. Quite frankly, it's a pain, and once you start a baby on food you can't go back. Wait until 5 or 6 months if you can, or whenever your baby shows readiness. Start with rice cereal with breast milk, and when you add foods add a small bit to the rice cereal to get them used to the taste. Only add a new food every week or so, so you can check for allergies.

Start babies on a soft-spouted sippy cup. They are more comfortable than the hard ones, and if hard plastic ones are dropped (or thrown) outside (say, from the stroller on a walk) they get nicked and are actually seem quite sharp. We like the Avent Magic Bottle ones, as they were interchangeable with the bottles we had (that we never used EXCEPT for sippy cups) as well as handles, bigger cups, etc. After they get the hang of it, I would recommend the Take-n-toss ones – work great and so inexpensive.

When they hit 2-3 switch to the straw kind of cup if they need a sippy one. Better for speech/oral motor skills.

NO cup is ever 'Spill-Proof'. That's a big, fat lie.

***Give them water in their cups, unless they need to gain weight. Gets them in a good habit, and they don't need the extra sugar of juice usually. When/if they do get juice, water it down by half. My kids loved water since they were babies – but most people start their kids on juice.***

Don't buy baby food jars of mashed bananas. A banana and a fork – that's all you need. Cheaper and less processing/packaging.

It's easy and cheaper to make your own baby food. Use a baby food grinder or food processor to grind whatever your eating, or yams, whatever. You can make big batches of steamed yams, carrots, applesauce, etc. and freeze them in ice-cube trays. Put the cubes in freezer bags and thaw what you need in the microwave (1 cube of applesauce + some oatmeal cereal was one of Princess's favorites).

When you eventually switch to a booster seat instead of a high chair, look for (if you don't get one of those gorgeous vintage metal ones...) one made of one molded piece of plastic – less nooks and crannies for the gunk.

## **Safety:**

Remember to move the crib mattress down to a lower level (you should start at the highest – saves your back) when your baby is old enough to sit up. That's when the mobile should come down, too. You can put the mobile over the changing table/area, though.

Car seat carriers are very convenient. Most people don't realize, though, that you need to move the carrying handle *back* when you're in the car. That's how the car seat is designed to work. (Took us to #3 to learn that one, and now I notice that EVERYONE leaves the handle up while driving).

Infant seats have weight *and height* limits. I've seen some crazy-long babies in seats that they're just too big for. They may not be 20 pounds, yet, but they've outgrown that infant seat! You can get bigger car seats for infants that can be placed forward or rear-facing ('convertible seats'). I took our car seat into a checkpoint once, and they said that the general rule is when the baby's head is within an inch of the top they are too tall for it.

Chest straps are supposed to be at armpit level.

Install your car seat correctly – there shouldn't be much wiggle room if you try and shake the seat (read the car seat manual carefully!)

Princess grew out of her infant seat at about 3 months. 4 tops. No lie – she was

You can use a plastic turkey baster for rinsing baby's head without getting water in their face.

For excema the best cream is Eucerin. Walmart makes a great generic brand of that. Aveeno is also good (Walmart makes a great generic brand of that, too).

Cradle cap: both of our boys have had cradle cap – we've tried several things: put a little olive oil on their head and rub on the scalp – then put a knit hat on top and leave it that way for a while.

In the tub, scrub the head with the little brush you get at the hospital (keep it! But tear off the sponge).

When they get a little older you can use T-gel and use a soft toothbrush to scrub their head.

Thomas's got better when we eventually (2 months) shaved his hair off. (The sides rubbed off, and then the top got all brittle for some reason – it was hard (emotionally) to buzz him, but the results were adorable – no more crazy hair, just cute. To go back, I'd do it with Princess, too.)

Try to avoid 'squirty' bath toys – they get gross. If you do have them, make sure you squeeze them out after every bath and let dry (get a net hangy bag for the tub). Even then they will probably get mold in them so be ready to toss them.

An all-in-one baby wash (Johnson's Babywash is great, also Gerber Oatmeal wash) works great and you just need a tiny bit – they last forever, but if your baby has a lot of hair don't use it on their heads. Start using a kids' tearless shampoo (and possibly conditioner) after a week or two. Baby hair is still hair, and needs a decent shampoo – otherwise it will get dry and break off easier.

### **How to shower yourself: (!)**

Shower while the baby is sleeping (with a monitor if you're concerned), or awake watching a mobile. Put the baby in a their car seat and take them in the bathroom with you. When they get mobile, put them in the exersaucer so that they can't get into trouble while you're in the shower. I used to shower during 'Elmo's World'. Princess never noticed I was gone...

Naps are good. Don't get rid of them. When your preschooler decides to kick the habit, keep that time devoted to "quiet time" or "reading time". This benefits both you and the child. I've noticed that after lunch is just a good time for everyone to have a break. Even in the summer, my kids come home for lunch and take a break from the heat and their friends. They get along better with their friends that way, too. I don't ever plan on getting rid of "quiet time". Not ever.

***Nap while your baby naps! Turn off the ringer on your phone before naps. It's worth it.***

## **Bathing:**

You can't have too many washcloths – with newborns always get out at least 3 per bath:

-Put a wet (warm) washcloth on the baby's tummy when they're in the baby tub – it helps keep them warm since their tummy's aren't always submerged in the infant tub. Pour water over their tummy now and then to keep it warm.

-One washcloth goes over the diaper area for boys to prevent being sprayed.

-One for actually washing the baby (face first!)

Extras would mean that if you have to change the water you already have some ready.

For newborns, there's a good chance you'll have to change the water at least once because they WILL pee in the water. I fill one of those pink tubs from the hospital (take it home!) up with slightly too warm water and keep it nearby, so that i can just drain one tub and pour the clean (and perfectly warm by that time) water in when that happens. Look for baby tubs with a stopper drain in the bottom – place the tub on a counter so the drain part is over the sink, and you can drain it fast.

Newborns are slippery. I haven't tried this, but I've heard that you can get cotton manicurist gloves at beauty supply stores to give your fingers more grip.

When baby is getting a little too big for a baby tub, but not quite big enough for the big tub, put the baby tub IN the big tub, that way you can fill it up all the way, without worrying about the tub overflowing or any splashing. I even put Thomas in his baby tub in the big tub with Princess – I wish i would have done that sooner, they both loved it.

18+ lbs and too fat to fit in the straps. We moved her to a rear-facing convertible seat but she still wasn't old enough to sit up, so she couldn't sit in shopping carts. I kept her old seat in the trunk of the car, and put her in it in the cart (the back, not the top because she couldn't be buckled in). That worked nicely for shopping.

Don't buy a walker. Even if you live on one-level. Kids get into all kinds of trouble that way – our pediatrician even told us not to get one. Exersaucers are better, but you still have to be careful. Get one that moves a little (saucer shaped) instead of completely flat on the bottom – better for their joints. Make sure you have it at the right level (I think they shouldn't be able to touch their feet flat on the bottom) and not for long periods of time. It can cause sports/stress injuries (but for showers, it's extremely helpful!).

## **Travel:**

For road trips, have one of you sit in the back with the baby to play/read/sing with them. When they're rear-facing it's especially useful, as they can't see you, and you can't reach them very well.

For air travel, make sure they have their pacifier or are nursing/drinking their bottle for take-off and landing. Helps their ears.

When traveling, take the things your baby is used to for sleep: a fan (especially useful to drown out noise made at families homes), music box, their favorite toy and book. You may want to bring their own sheet and blanket so that they smell normal to the baby (not like someone else's fabric softener). Depending on the house setup, you may also want to bring a baby monitor, so that after the baby's asleep you can go visit with family in another area of the house. Also bring a night light – you may need it yourself to get to the baby during the night in an unfamiliar room.

For everyday travel, you may want a rear-facing mirror for the backseat. You position it so that you can see the baby from the rear-view mirror. Babies make tons of weird noises, I was always worrying that Princess was choking or spitting up all over herself since I couldn't see her in her rear-facing seat. The mirror helped ease my concerns.

## **Best purchases:**

I think that for us, these were our best kid-related purchases:

1 - Double-jogger stroller- I bought this right after Thomas was born. It is a lifesaver! If I had realized how much better it was to have a jogger, I would have bought a double when I only had one kiddo. Seriously, why waste money on a single, and then have to upgrade? I could have put snacks and toys in the extra side. Also - it's worth the extra money to get an aluminum frame! So much lighter!

2 - Rocking chair - bought right after Princess was born.

3 - Rocker/recliner - We upgraded after Thomas - which was a good thing, because it saved us during his ear-infection phase! When they won't be laid down to sleep because of an ear infection (it hurts them to be laid down – they want to be upright), you can still catch some zz's by just reclining. Also - SO comfy and perfect for nursing. It is known by all as Kirsten's (or Mom's) chair and is quickly vacated if I want it!

4 - Little Tikes slide - bought for Princess when she was about 16 months. We keep it inside usually, and all my kids use it still! They slide down it, use it for playroom obstacle courses, and of course, push matchbox cars down it.

5 - Little Tikes picnic table - we usually keep this inside, too. I got sick of cleaning up 'yogurt-paintings' on the big table. This is a great place to have them eat - especially snacks. We've used our steam-cleaner on it to get it really clean. Plus, the kids feel like 'big-kids' when they sit there. When I had Princess's preschool co-op going on, we fit several kids there for coloring and snacks.

## **Miscellaneous:**

Use your closed-captioning on your TV. Muting the TV and reading the captions will save your sanity while rocking/bouncing a really fussy/tired baby. Also normally keep the captions on, but the sound a little lower. More baby-ear-friendly but you don't miss any dialogue that way.

We've had good luck with music in the baby's bedroom. Princess's favorites were “The Planet Sleeps” (a really cool collection of international lullabies) and later an Enya album. We did this with her even when she was newborn, as it seemed to help. It's a signal for them to go to sleep. Thomas went through a thing where he wouldn't sleep through the night, unless you put on the soundtrack to “Piglet's Big Movie”.

Nap while your baby naps!

With a newborn, before you go to sleep for the night, get out several extra onesies, sleepers, diapers and wipes and put them by your bed or wherever the baby sleeps – leakage is very probable, and you'll need to change the whole outfit. It's also a good idea to keep a small lap pad under the baby, so you don't have to change all the sheets. We kept one under Princess's head as well, as she spit up a LOT.

Be extremely careful if you let your baby sleep in your bed with you. We used the cradle when they were newborn – it's just so risky otherwise. Napping on the couch is another thing, though – there is nothing in the world like napping with a baby sleeping on your tummy!

You don't really need a toddler bed, unless you want it to conserve space. We got ours when we were living in our apartment (and found a great deal on it at Kid2Kid). There are other things you can do when your toddler starts climbing out of/outgrowing the crib: put the crib mattress on the floor, put a twin mattress on the floor, go straight to a twin bed with a removable side railing so they don't fall off.

An exercise/yoga ball is great for bouncing a baby to sleep.

Routines! Your baby (and child) needs a routine. Be consistent about what times you feed them, put them down for naps, etc. Especially important at bedtime, if you want them to go to sleep on their own (example: bath, pj's, books, prayer, turn on cd player, put in bed).

Part of the above is: be home for nap time. I've known people who say that their baby just won't nap, but they tended to run errands all during nap time. Of course they're not going to nap if you're dragging them from store to store when they want to be sleeping. Or they may sleep for 10 minutes in the car and call it good (and be very fussy later). It's worth scheduling things around naps in order to save the baby's routine.

## Sleeping:

Newborns feel more secure sleeping in smaller spaces, so they don't usually like being put in the middle of a big crib. Lay them down at one end, head to toe going the short way, so they have bumper pad above, below and to one side of them. Then roll up a receiving blanket and place it to the other side of them, just close enough so that the baby will touch it if she reaches her arm out.

After the baby is a too big to lay this way, always lay them down with their feet at one end of the crib. That way they can't wriggle down under the blanket (suffocation danger).

Put your baby on their side to sleep. You can use a rolled up receiving blanket by their back so that they don't roll over. This helps them not to develop a flat head (more prevelant now) and also helps them not to choke if they spit up. Switch which side the baby faces every night, though.

Nap while your baby naps!

We like to use a humidifier or small fan for 'white noise'. It really helps the baby sleep, and muffles the other sounds in the house, like the doorknobs (you never realize how loud opening and closing doors are until you have a newborn), the phone, the TV, etc. At one point we kept the fan out in the hall outside of the baby's room, that way it's not so loud in the room that the baby gets too used to it where they can't sleep without it, but it still muffles noise.

Get your baby to sleep in his own bed! It's worth it – even if you rock him to sleep, lay him down in his crib or cradle when he's asleep. We have our babies sleep in a cradle by our bed for about the first 2 months. When the nighttime feedings die down, we move them into their room and the big crib.

Also, the crying it out thing works! We did it with all 3 of our kids, and they cried for about an hour (or less) the first night, about half that the second night, and the third night they'd cry for 5 minutes and fall asleep. There's lots of books about it – you might want to read up before you try it. We waited too long with Princess – she was at least 9 months, but Thomas was about 7 months and it went smoother. He was teething or we would've done it sooner – at 6 months. I wouldn't recommend it before the baby is at least 5 months.

Keep a couple of extra diapers and wipes in the car.

Keep a couple of books in the car, too, for if you're ever waiting for someone/something in the car.

If you want your baby to take a pacifier, start them on it in the hospital. Sometimes newborns will take it better if you put your hand on their cheek and then give them the pacifier (a nursing reflex), or wiggle the pacifier slightly.

A shopping cart cover is awesome once baby can sit up. Wish I would have had one for the first two. I keep it under the baby's seat in the car (and bring it inside occasionally to wash it).

Toddlers/preschoolers like to play where you are. They want to be right with you (which is wonderful, except when you're making dinner – and it's good for them to learn to play by themselves). Playing music in the playroom increases the chances of that happening.

Keep a little basket/box in the living room that you can throw baby toys into. Even when they're older and you want toys in the playroom/bedroom, toys WILL end up in the living room and it's nice to have a place to put them when straightening up quickly.

Rotate toys. Put some away for a couple of weeks or a month and then switch them. The older the kids get, the longer between switches (we keep meaning to do better about this).

If you're ever at a fast-food place and get a kids' meal, ask for the 'toddler toy'. They have toys that are safe for the under 3 set, and they make great toys for diaper bags or in the car – you usually don't care if you lose them, but they're something new and interesting to entertain the baby for a while.

If you care about your couches/chairs: Buy slipcovers. Do it now.

My mother-in-law told me when Princess was a newborn: If both of you are dressed, fed and clean by lunchtime, you're doing great. When you get the hang of parenting a little, aim for one household job a day – don't feel bad about not doing every chore every day.

January 2007

## Other places for tips:

[www.parenthacks.com](http://www.parenthacks.com)

(a site I read and contribute to)

Kid Tips (book) by Tom McMahon

*Dear friend,*

When one of my friends was pregnant with her first child, I decided to try and type up some quick tips of things that we've learned with our kids, that would have been useful to know before June 2000 (when our first child was born).

At the time of this writing, my children are: Princess 6, Thomas 4, and Monkey 20 months.

I do not profess myself to be an expert, but consider myself a fairly well-informed parent.

Some of these ideas may be more useful to you than others, and I don't expect you to use all of them, but they are all things we learned through experience or from others. I hope you enjoy these little thoughts, which were put together with happy thoughts and love.

*Love, Kirsten*

-kirstencan.typepad.com-