

Washing & Drying Nappies

The Real Nappy Association recommends washing nappies at 60 degrees to sterilise them thoroughly. However, like it or not, you and your family share your bugs with your baby, and so it is not necessary to sterilise nappies in this way every wash, and a 40 degree wash is perfectly adequate for the most part. It is not necessary to separate nappies from the rest of the family wash, either (although you will want to avoid washing with dark colours, to prevent any colour transference). If you wash at 40 degrees generally, I would suggest that you do a 60 degree wash at least once a week, just to be on the safe side.

The hotter you wash your wraps, in particular, the more you will shorten their life span, and so will tumble drying. This is particularly true of Velcro wraps, as it is the Velcro that eventually goes.

You SHOULD wash at 60 degrees in any of the following circumstances:

- If your baby is under about 3 months old (whilst they have no real resistance of their own)
- If using Eco Balls rather than detergent
- If your baby has any history of repeated rashing or skin sensitivity
- If you have two or more babies using the same nappies
- If your baby is unwell

New nappies should be washed a couple of times before use as this improves absorbency.

Do not use fabric conditioner, as this coats the fabric and gradually reduces absorbency. Never wash (or soak) your nappies in Bicarbonate of Soda, vinegar, bleach or harsh stain removers, over time this can cause considerable damage to the fabric of the nappies, and will negate any warranty.

As for washing powder, when the time comes to do a wash, simply run a normal 60 degree wash with your usual non bio (NOT ECOVER) washing power detergent. The most important point to remember is to always use half the recommend dose of powder when washing your nappies as using too much powder will result in residue building up in the fabric which can cause sensitivity. Some biological detergents contain an enzyme called 'cellulase' which can have a degrading effect on cellulose fibres like bamboo and cotton and this can be particularly severe if combined with the levels of heat used when tumble drying. For this reason we would recommend you use non bio or use extreme caution if you choose to use biological detergent, and in the case of bamboo fibre would recommend the use of non-bio.

We DO NOT Recommend the use of Ecover with any cloth nappies as we find it frequently causes skin issues and problems with elastic in the nappies as it tends to build up on fibres very quickly.

Note that not all powders (or liquids) are as good as others, and some may have agents added to which your child is sensitive. Formulas also change periodically, and so a powder you have used happily before may suddenly bring your child out in rash. We recommend Surecare or Filetti (available in Tesco's etc, in a pink plastic bag) as the detergents you are least likely to be allergic to. Just be aware that once you start to use real nappies, a very sensitive part of your child's body is now coming into contact with detergents, and if they have problems with redness, it could easily be related to this.

If you are concerned about environmental friendliness, it is best to avoid the big name brands. Bio-D, ECOS and Clearspring have all performed well in environmental evaluations.

One nappy wash (if done on its own rather than as part of a family wash) is normally approximately half a load, so you may prefer to do a full load every other day if this suits your circumstances/washing machine, and you want to keep nappies separate. However, be aware that you will need more nappies and wraps to cope with this routine, and also your nappy bucket will start to smell quite strongly when the lid is taken off it, if you do not change the water daily. Some people wash every third day, but this is usually only practical once the child is a toddler, and only using 4 nappies per 24 hours or so.

If you live in a hard water area, nappies will gradually become hard because of the detergents that build up. This actually does not matter too much to your baby, because they will have a paper or washable liners over the nappy, so they will not be uncomfortable. If you are using shaped nappies we advise you DO NOT use softening agents such as Calgon which can cause damage to the elastic in the nappies. Use of these products negates any product warranty. If using terry squares this is not a concern but it is debatable as to whether these are good for sensitive skin.

We do not recommend you use ecoball or soapnuts with any wraps or nappies containing PUL as it may invalidate any product warranty if you do.

In general order of preference, these are the best ways to dry your nappies:

1. Outside on the line - the sun is a natural bleach.
2. Ceiling drying rack.
3. Airing cupboard.
4. In front of an Aga or other similar oven (or old fashioned stove).

5. Freestanding or overbath dryer - a dryer is best stood in a well-ventilated room such as a conservatory or bedroom, as bathrooms often have too damp an atmosphere to dry effectively.
6. Tumble drier - makes nappies feel nice and soft, but works out expensive and also shortens the life span of your nappies by taking out the pile gradually. You will need to remember to empty the filter regularly of all the fluff. Or you could give your nappies no more than 10 minutes in the tumble drier and then finish them off in one of the other ways listed, to get some of the softness without the cost. Other people swear by keeping the 10 minute tumble dry for the end of the drying period, rather than the beginning, but that is difficult to time.
7. Radiator - nappies will feel quite hard, but can be shaken out to soften them up a bit.
8. Terries and prefold can also be ironed dry - many shaped nappies cannot be, either because they are too thick, or they contain some material which should not be ironed. This option is bottom of the list because it involves the serious disadvantage of requiring some effort on your part! Never iron wraps.

Note that you should not dry any clothes in a room used by anyone with a sensitivity to house dust mites, as these love to breed in the warm air produced by damp clothing.

With washing, all nappies will get stiffer than they were when new, although it does help to live in a soft water area (eg Wales!). Shaped terries with a stretch agent (eg Motherease) in them or microfibre nappies such as the Teddy will tend not to go as hard as old fashioned terries. Bear in mind, however, that your baby will not feel the material directly against their bottom anyway, because there will be a liner on top. Also, as soon as baby wees, the whole thing softens up.

A washing machine with a higher speed spin will reduce the amount of drying needed. However, I would recommend that you keep the spin speed below around 1000 revs, because higher than this may damage some nappies, or at least make the fabric go tatty. You will know from your own experience of washing your clothes how fierce your spin facility is!