

Consumer Choices

Selecting baby's first clothes

You can make wise consumer choices about the kinds of clothes your baby needs.

Planning for a new baby is exciting. Selecting the tiny clothes is a lot of fun, but you may be tempted to buy impractical items or more than actually is needed. Babies grow very fast. You won't need many items in the smallest sizes because your child will soon need the next larger size. This publication will help you decide about clothes for your baby.

Choosing the basic layette

Your new baby will spend most of the time sleeping. Simple clothes help babies stay warm and comfortable. The basic layette includes diapers, sleepers or gowns, undershirts, bibs, a sweater, caps, socks or booties, blankets, and crib sheets. Many parents find disposable baby wipes and diapers convenient. Daytime outfits, hooded bath towels, buntings or out-door wear are often optional. Items with licensed characters such as those from Disney® or Winnie the Pooh™ generally cost more.

Fabrics, size, and design

Infant clothing is designed to appeal to adults, but comfort and appeal do not always go together. Reading labels will help you decide about baby clothes. Baby's skin is tender, so soft, lightweight cotton fabrics are usually best.

Look for clothing labels to identify fiber content and explain the care the baby clothes require. Cotton is absorbent and breathes so body moisture can evaporate. Jersey knit fabrics (similar to cotton t-shirts) are good choices because they retain their shape, shrink little, and do not require ironing. For woven fabric designs, cotton/polyester blends are

comfortable and resilient, requiring little pressing. When synthetic fibers such as nylon, polyester, or acrylic are used, a cotton undershirt may be used next to baby's skin.

Baby clothes are sized by the age in months. However, the actual size varies from one brand to another. Some labels may indicate the height and weight for the size. The American Society for Testing and Materials sizes (See Table 1) are based on nude height and weight measurements, but manufacturers' use of these standards is voluntary. Regardless of birth weight, which varies greatly, a baby will rapidly grow in weight and length during the first year. Very few items in the 0-3-month size are needed. Remember that if your child is 9-month size in the heat of July or August in Iowa, a winter sweater in that size may never be worn.

Comfortable fit and growth allowance should come from design choice, not from buying clothes several sizes too large. Sleepers or garments with feet should have ample room for baby's feet to wiggle and grow. Fabrics, trim, and construction features should not irritate the skin. Desirable features are:

- Garments that hang from the shoulders
- Raglan or kimono sleeves
- Easy to fasten neck and other openings
- Flat necklines and non-bulky collars
- A minimum of non-bulky, smooth, flat, flexible seams
- Elastic that is loose fitting on sleeves or cuffs
- Non-binding waistlines with pull-on pants or outfits
- Comfortable fit—not too loose or tight
- Snug-fitting sleepwear

Table 1. Size standards issued by the American Society for Testing and Materials

| | Age in months | | | | |
|---------------|---------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 0-3 | 3-6 | 6-9 | 9-12 | 12-18 |
| Height (in.) | Up to 23.5 | 24-26.5 | 27-28.5 | 29-30.5 | 31-32.5 |
| Weight (lbs.) | Up to 12 | 12.5-16 | 16.5-18 | 18.5-20 | 20.5-24 |

Choosing diapers for a baby's health

Infants wear diapers all of the time. Babies can be equally healthy with either disposable or cloth diapers. Today, most parents prefer single-use disposables. Studies have shown that disposables keep babies dryer, do not leak as much, and maintain normal skin pH, so child care facilities usually require them. With disposables most babies must be changed six or seven times a day. With cloth diapers babies must be changed more frequently to avoid conditions that lead to diaper rash.

Some people may have strong feelings that cloth diapers are more environmentally friendly, but studies have shown that this is questionable when the costs of energy to heat the water and dry the laundered diapers and other laundering costs such as equipment, detergents, etc. and the value of your time are taken into consideration.

The following information may help you decide which type of diapers fits your lifestyle.

Single Use Disposable Diapers (4 dozen per week)

- fasten with tape
- shaped to fit and hold urine
- keep baby's skin dryer
- leak less; rubber pants unnecessary
- made in range of sizes for growing child
- made with plastic (polyethylene covers), filled with cellulosic fluff and liquid absorbing gel, and a polypropylene liner that wicks moisture away from baby's skin
- for disposal empty feces in toilet and fold diaper with soiled side in

Flat cloth diapers (3 to 4 dozen)

- fastened with diaper pins
- are flat 21 x 40 inch rectangles to be folded to needed size
- can be folded differently to fit as baby grows
- may be doubled for greater absorbency
- require water proof diaper pants to prevent leaking

- made with absorbent cotton in gauze, birds eye, or flannelette fabrics
- should be laundered daily (*See Caring for cloth diapers)

Form-fitted cloth diapers (start with 2 dozen in smallest size)

- fasten with snaps or Velcro®
- water-proof cover may be attached or separate.
- may require supplemental water-proof diaper pants to prevent leaking
- purchase cost per diaper is higher
- can be purchased in a range of sizes to fit as baby grows
- made with layers of cotton fabric cut to shape, stitched together, and bound at edges
- require longer drying time and are more costly to maintain than flat cloth

Caring for cloth diapers

Proper laundering of cloth diapers is essential to baby's health. Follow these steps:

1. Rinse soiled diapers in the toilet bowl to remove solid waste, being careful not to flush the diaper and clog the drain.
2. Collect the day's soiled diapers in a pail containing a soak solution of cold water mixed with either borax and detergent; all-fabric bleach and detergent; diaper soak product; or one or two tablespoons of liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water.
3. Launder diapers daily for better sanitation and odor control. Pour diapers and soaking solution into the washer and spin.
4. Use detergent and warm water in the washer presoak cycle; spin again.
5. Wash in hot water with detergent and diluted chlorine bleach to sanitize. It probably will not be necessary to bleach with every wash.
6. Rinse thoroughly in cold water to remove all detergent residues. Avoid using too much fabric softener too often because it can reduce absorbency of diapers.
7. Use regular dryer setting or line dry.

The type of detergent probably is not critical, but carbonate-based detergents tend to build up in fabrics if wash water is hard. This will make diapers feel harsh. Fabric softeners will not help this. You can avoid this problem by using heavy-duty liquid detergents, phosphate detergents, or soaps advertised for diaper laundering.

Diaper service

In some locations a diaper service may be available, but few exist in Iowa. Diaper service costs more than home laundering or disposables because of transportation costs. If it is available in your location, you prefer cloth diapers, and your time is limited, a cloth diaper service may be right for you.

Waterproof diaper covers (4 - 6 pair)

Parents who use only disposables may not need diaper covers. However, with cloth diapers, waterproof pants are necessary. They come in styles that open out flat, for changing with snap fasteners or grippers, or in pull-on styles with elastic at waist and legs. As your child grows, you should notice how tight the elastic is, so that it does not "cut" or leave red marks on a baby's skin.

Plastic pants can be washed with diapers to prevent odor and staining. Do not put them in the dryer because they might melt or catch fire.

Choosing Sleepwear (4 - 6 pair)

Children's sleepwear sizes 0 - 6X and 7 - 14 must meet flammability standards governed by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). These standards no longer require use of flame resistant fibers. Now children's sleepwear can be cotton as long as it is *snug or tight fitting*. The CPSC defined measurements for "*tight-fitting*." However, children vary in proportions. *Parents must decide what tight fitting means for each child.* Sleepwear labels indicate if it is not flame resistant. Watch for these sleepwear labels:

"WEAR SNUG FITTING:
NOT FLAME RESISTANT"

"FOR CHILD'S SAFETY GARMENT SHOULD
FIT SNUGLY. THIS GARMENT IS NOT
FLAME RESISTANT."

"LOOSE-FITTING GARMENT IS MORE
LIKELY TO CATCH FIRE."

Cotton is very flammable. But, the CPSC found that parents preferred cotton for their children for its absorbency and texture. Parents were letting children sleep in loose play clothes and t-shirts rather than sleepwear of flame resistant fibers. It was argued that babies were unlikely to move around enough to get into a flame or heat source that could set cotton clothes on fire.

Flame retardant or resistant fibers are difficult to ignite, slow to burn, and fabrics usually

self-extinguish. Flame resistant fibers do not guarantee a child's safety if their clothes catch fire, but give a little extra time to put out the fire before it surrounds and severely burns a child. Flame resistant fabrics do not provide safety against fire in a burning building.

The CPSC monitors the frequency of burn injury and if the tight-fitting sleepwear standard is associated with an increase in children's burn injuries, the Children's Sleepwear Flammability Standards will undoubtedly be changed again.

Choosing Bedding (3 - 6 receiving blankets; 3 crib sheets; 1 - 2 crib blankets)

Baby's first blankets are "receiving blankets" that may be cotton flannelette, jersey knit, or lightweight stretch-terry. At first, the baby is wrapped closely in these for warmth and security. As they become more active and learn to roll over, at about 4-months, these are less necessary because underclothing and sleepers give sufficient warmth.

Crib deaths (SIDS—Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) are rare, but you should be aware that pediatricians recommend that babies sleep on their backs. Pillows and lots of blankets increase the risk of smothering.

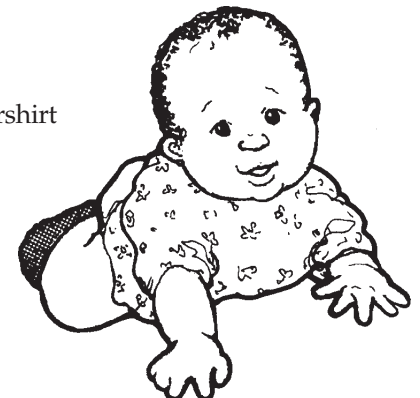
Crib-size blankets and quilts are not needed as a cover during baby's naptime or sleeping, if he/she is dressed warmly, but are useful as play surfaces on the floor or to cover the stroller when you go outdoors. Look for warmth without weight and avoid slippery fabrics that make it difficult to hold onto the baby. Polyester fleece, acrylic, and knit cotton blankets and other styles in medium weights are available.

Crib sheets to fit the standard crib are available in cotton percale, muslin, or jersey knits. At least two or three are necessary so that a clean one is available while another gets washed.

Choosing other clothes

Undershirts (4 - 6)

Baby probably needs to wear an undershirt with the diaper under sleepwear—especially in cool temperatures or an air-conditioned house. Undershirts may be pull-on or wrap styles and generally are cotton or a cotton/polyester blend jersey knit. They may tie or snap closed if front opening. In very hot weather or climates, they



may be unnecessary. Probably only four to six undershirts are needed in the smallest sizes. This is a good item to get as a hand-me-down because they are outgrown so quickly.

Bibs and absorbent wipes (4 - 6 bibs; 2 - 4 terry washcloths/towels) Baby does not need to wear a bib constantly, but nursing is sometimes a messy business. A bib will protect baby's clothes from getting wet at the neckline and minimize the number of changes needed in a day. Parents and caregivers will need absorbent towels, cloth wipes, pads, receiving blankets, or cloth diapers to use over their shoulders while burping the baby. An ordinary terry washcloth or hand towel works well for this purpose.

Sweater & Caps (2 or 3, depending on season)

Sweaters and caps may be made of cotton jersey, sweatshirt fleece, or knitted with acrylic or lambs wool yarns. Front-opening cardigan style knits are best. The cotton jersey, sweatshirt fleece, and acrylic knits are machine washable, but wool requires hand washing.

If your baby is born in hot weather, a 0 - 3 months sweater may not get much use. However, a cap will be needed each time the baby goes outdoors. Caps in some sweater/cap sets may be too small. A tiny baby's head is disproportionately large compared to the shoulders and body.

Covering the head and ears will protect baby in cool weather as well as protect from the ultraviolet rays of the sun.

SUN SAFETY: Infants of less than six months should be kept in the shade. Cover their skin with clothes, caps, or receiving blankets. At this age, sunscreen cannot be used safely. Sunburn is painful and sunburn in childhood is associated with skin cancer in adulthood. The sun is most harmful between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. and can penetrate glass or clouds and reflect off snow, a lake, swimming pool, the oceans, or sand. Infants must be protected in these situations.

Infant footwear (6 pair socks)

Footed pajamas, slipper socks, socks or booties are adequate protection for baby's feet until she/he begins to stand or walk. Absorbent cotton socks are enough and if they contain spandex or elastomeric fibers to help keep them on the feet, they should not be so tight that they mark the skin. Shoes are not needed for support, but for protection from ground surfaces that may be hot, cold, rough, or slippery. Baby's footwear should not bind or pinch.

Dress-up clothing

Baby fashions change as adult fashions do. Thin cotton/linen blend voiles and fancy embroidered dress-up clothes are less popular than formerly. Instead, the clothing market offers jeans and casual knits with various licensed designs. Regardless of the design, baby needs few dress-up clothes.

An IDEA for You! If friends plan a baby shower, suggest that they contribute to a group gift, such as a car seat or stroller, rather than spend on dress-up clothes. Car seats are required by law in most states.

The marketplace offers fancy baby clothes with grandparents and friends in mind, but your child will seldom wear these clothes. Remember that comfort and safety are most important for baby's clothes.

No endorsement of products or firms is intended, nor is criticism implied of those not mentioned.