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Baby products: Must-haves for the first year



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Products you need for your baby

Which baby products are essential for the first year? Look over our checklist of the most important things you'll need to [clothe](#), [transport](#), bathe, and [feed your baby](#) as well as give him a safe place to sleep and explore. You'll also find specific information about the supplies you need in the first six weeks and [what to put on your baby registry](#) too.

If you want to go beyond the basics, we also have a [list of product "extras"](#) that can make the first year even easier.

To help you focus on the must-haves for your registry, BabyCenter surveyed moms to see what they registered for most. Watch our countdown of the top 10 items. [See all pregnancy videos](#)

Baby clothes

Baby clothes are usually sized by age, but this can vary among brands. For example, a 3- to 6-month bodysuit from one brand may be snug on your 4-month old, while the same size from another brand could be too big. Look for clothes that also list weight or height guidelines to help you find the ones that will fit your baby best.

Some babies go straight to 3 months and never need newborn sizes, but that's hard to predict in advance, so it doesn't hurt to have some on hand. Also make sure you have a couple outfits in the next size up before your child actually needs it – babies grow quickly! Buying secondhand clothes and accepting hand-me-downs are a good way to make sure you'll always have the right size.

For everyday wear, think comfort and ease. Look for soft, roomy, durable clothing that enables your child to move and explore. Choose well-made items that will hold up through frequent washings. (Spit-up and grime take their toll.)

Organic baby clothing is made without harsh dyes or potentially harmful chemicals, but it's usually more expensive. Whatever you choose, use a gentle, [baby-friendly laundry detergent](#) to prevent skin irritation.

Here are the basics your baby will need for the first three months:

One-piece outfits (5 to 7): Some of these are basically just jammies that are appropriate for both sleeping and playing. These are super convenient, especially at first, because babies nap so frequently. Look for ones that zip or snap down the front and all the way down the leg, so you can change your baby's clothes and diapers easily without pulling things over her head.

Shirts and bodysuits (5 to 7): Choose ones with snaps at the neck (or a neckline that stretches) so they slip easily over your child's head.

Leggings or stretchy pants (5 to 7): These make it easy to change one piece of dirty clothing without having to switch the whole outfit. An elastic waistband fits easily over your baby's diaper and belly – and expands as she gains weight.

Outer layers (5): Zip-up sweaters, fleece jackets, and sweatshirts are easy to put on and take off. Many babies don't like pushing their head through a small neck opening.

Buy larger sizes and look for items with loose armholes that won't require tugging and fussing. Hoods are helpful at this age because you can just slip one over your baby's head when the temperature is chilly.

Avoid clothing that has dangling strings, tassels, and ribbons – these are choking hazards.

Hats and mittens: A broad-brimmed sun hat for the summer and a warm hat that covers the ears in the winter should do the trick. Mittens for babies are shaped like bags with elastic at the wrist, making them easy to get on and off little hands.

Socks or booties: You'll need lots of socks for indoors and booties or leather slippers to wear outside.

Shoes: You may not need to buy real, [hard-soled shoes](#) during your baby's first year. Some experts recommend waiting until your child is a strong walker because shoes can interfere with development. Until then, cover her feet with socks or booties that have nonskid bottoms.

When it comes time to buy sturdier footwear, go to a store that specializes in children's shoes. A salesperson can measure your child's feet, recommend an appropriate style or brand, and suggest the size that fits well and allows for growth.

Pajamas or sleepers (5 to 7): When [dressing your baby for bed](#), keep in mind three things: your baby's safety, her comfort, and how easily you'll be able to change the inevitable middle-of-the-night dirty diaper. No matter how cute it looks, avoid sleepwear that has a lot of snaps or is otherwise difficult to get on and off.

Soft, breathable natural fabrics like cotton are comfy, and if they fit snugly they're a good alternative to synthetic, flame-resistant clothing (usually made of polyester). Avoid ribbons, strings, ties, and other decorative items that could get wrapped around your baby and pose a choking hazard.

Diapers

Diapers: Whether you use [cloth](#), [disposable](#), or something in between (like a diaper with a disposable lining and reusable cover), your baby probably will go through 10 to 12 diapers a day at first, so plan accordingly. If you use disposables, you might want to start with small packs of a few different kinds in case certain types irritate your baby's skin or don't fit well.

Wipes: Whether you plan to buy wipes, make your own wipes, or use a washcloth and warm water, have plenty on hand so you're prepared.

Changing pad or table: You don't have to buy an actual [changing table](#), but you'll probably want to designate a place for diaper changes. Some parents use a changing pad or just put a towel on the floor or bed. (Keep your hand on your baby at all times when changing on an elevated surface.)

Baby gear

Baby carrier: Wearing your baby means your little one gets to snuggle close to you, and you'll have two free hands to do everything else.

When [choosing a baby carrier](#), make sure all straps and harnesses support your baby securely. It's also a good idea to find one that can be laundered or cleaned easily.

Note: Although many parents swear by slings, this type of baby carrier has been linked to injuries and suffocation in babies. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has [safety tips for parents using slings](#).

Stroller: You'll need an efficient way to take your baby around town. Think about your specific needs: Do you want storage space to make shopping with your baby easier? Do you want a seat that reclines for easy napping? Will you be climbing up and down a lot of stairs? [Choosing the right stroller](#) can make your life a lot easier.

Car seat: A safe car seat is mandatory. Tempting as it may be, resist buying a [used car seat](#). Safety regulations have changed over the years, and you need one that meets all current guidelines. Also, you may not know if a secondhand seat has been in an accident and should no longer be used.

Most car seats produced today have a label with an expiration date printed on it, and they're usually considered safe for five to eight years. Manufacturers won't honor warranties on an expired seat, and there's a good chance the seat will no longer meet current safety features by the time it expires. Always check the expiration date when [shopping for a new car seat](#).

Breastfeeding and bottle-feeding

Nursing or feeding pillow: These are specially designed to support your baby while you're nursing or bottle-feeding, and they can help you avoid straining your shoulders or neck. They're more convenient – and better at keeping your baby in position – than regular pillows.

Breastfeeding accessories: Lanolin ointment (available in many drugstores) can relieve sore nipples. And warm or cold gel packs, which fit inside your bra, can soothe swollen or sore breasts. It's normal for your breasts to leak while you're nursing, and breast pads – disposable or reusable, washable ones – will keep you and your shirts nice and dry.

Burp cloths (6 to 12): Lightweight cloths (or cloth diapers) catch spit-up and wipe up other baby fluids.

Bottles (6 to 12): Newborns usually start with the 4-ounce size, but you'll need some 8-ounce bottles as your child begins to drink more. You'll also need at least as many nipples as bottles.

When it comes to which kind of baby bottle to use, some parents prefer glass or stainless steel bottles to avoid possible chemical leaching in [plastic bottles](#). In recent years, there's been concern about bisphenol A (BPA) in plastic bottles. Plastic bottles made today no longer contain any BPA (and usually say so on the bottle), but if you buy used plastic bottles, don't get clear bottles imprinted with the recycling number 7 or the letters "PC."

Formula: If you aren't breastfeeding, you have lots of [infant formula options](#) to choose from – check out our [formula primer](#) and talk to your healthcare provider.

Bottle brushes (2): These are handy for thoroughly scrubbing small parts and crevices in bottles, bottle parts, and nipples.

Breast pump: You may want to pump breast milk to feed your baby. Breast pumps can be as simple as a basic hand pump or as efficient as an electric model that allows you to pump from both breasts simultaneously. One popular style comes in a backpack with a small cooler to store milk.

Our [breast pump guide](#) can help you decide which type to go with and whether to rent or buy.

Breast milk bags: You can pump milk straight into a bottle, but many women use specially made plastic storage bags, which don't take up much space in the freezer and can be defrosted easily. The number of bags you'll need depends on how often you plan to pump. Start with one box and buy more when you need them.

Sleeping

Crib and mattress: Many new parents don't need a [crib](#) right away, choosing to use a [bassinet](#) or [play yard](#) with a bassinet feature or [bring their newborn into their bed](#) instead. But you'll likely want to move your baby into a crib sometime in the first year, so it's helpful to [buy one ahead of time](#) and have it set up.

New cribs meet the latest safety standards, but secondhand cribs may be dangerously out of date. If you buy a used crib, look for a sturdy crib with slats that aren't too far apart – no more than 2 3/8 inches (about the size of a soda can). Avoid drop-side cribs, which have caused dozens of baby deaths and have been banned in the United States since 2011. Make sure your baby's [mattress](#) fits snugly in the crib.

Bedding: You'll see plenty of fancy bedding sets in baby stores, but all you really need are three to five fitted crib sheets and a waterproof crib mattress pad. The [bumpers](#), pillows, quilts, and soft blankets that often come with baby bedding sets shouldn't even go in your baby's crib because they [increase the risk of SIDS](#).

Wearable blankets (2 or 3): These fleece or cotton sacks zip over your baby's sleepwear and keep him warm at night. They replace traditional blankets, which [aren't safe for sleeping babies](#) because of the risk of SIDS. You may or may not need these, depending on the climate where you live and what season your baby's born in.

Swaddling blankets (3): Many newborns [love to be swaddled](#), and having a few blankets made just for this purpose can make your life much easier. Note: Some wearable blankets are also designed for swaddling, with flaps that fold over your baby's arms and secure with Velcro.

Feeding

When your baby is [ready for solid food](#), somewhere between 4 and 6 months of age, these [feeding supplies](#) can make the transition easier.

Highchair: You can buy a freestanding highchair, a seat that hooks onto a counter or table, or a portable highchair that attaches to a regular chair. But a full-size highchair with a tray is easy to clean, and wheels make it easy to move the chair around. Look for a model with a seat cover you can remove and throw in the washing machine because you can count on food getting mashed into every crack.

Bowls (2 to 3): Some parents like baby bowls with suction cups on the bottom that stick to the highchair tray (so they can't be flung to the floor easily).

Baby spoons (3 to 5): A rubber-tipped or plastic spoon is easier on your baby's gums and small enough to fit comfortably into a little mouth.

Sippy cups (3 to 5): These cups come with a lid and a spout for easy drinking – and they don't spill when knocked over.

Cups with handles will probably be easiest for your child to manage at first. Don't buy cups with an attached straw – they leak and are hard to clean.

If you're concerned about BPA, phthalates, and other chemicals in plastics, there are plenty of alternatives, including reusable metal water bottles small enough for a baby's hands.

Bibs (3 to 5): Waterproof or quick-drying bibs are useful, as are bibs with a pocket at the bottom to catch falling food.

Bathing

Bath tub: The kitchen sink works fine at first for [bathing your baby](#), but you might want to move your baby to a tub before too long. Choose one that's sturdy and well made.

Soap and shampoo: Look for no-tears formulas that are easier on your baby's skin and eyes. Choose brands that don't list "fragrance" as an ingredient if you want to avoid [phthalates](#) in your baby's shampoo or soap. (Manufacturers aren't required to list phthalates separately, so they're often included with the fragrance ingredients.)

Towels (2 to 3): Regular bath towels are often too big to use on a baby. A soft, hooded towel works well for wrapping up your baby and drying him after his bath.

Washcloths (4 to 6): You can always find uses for baby washcloths – put one on the bottom of the tub to keep your baby from sliding around in the tub, or use one to wipe her off after eating.

Baby soothers, toys, and entertainment

Pacifiers (3 to 5): Some babies love them, some don't. Pacifiers aren't a necessity by any means, but for some parents and babies, these [soothers](#) are essential.

Bouncy seat: These baby seats bounce up and down when your little one kicks or moves. It's a handy, safe place to put your baby down (thanks to the attached straps), and many babies love the motion.

Play mat and gym: These are soft mats with baby toys that dangle from overhead. Babies who aren't mobile yet can have a ball batting at the toys. Fancy versions feature lights and sounds.

Toys: Your baby doesn't need a lot of fancy playthings, but it's nice to have a few rattles, musical toys, and soft toys.

Books: [Chunky board books](#) are a great way to introduce reading to your baby.

Safety

As soon as your child is [rolling](#), [crawling](#), or creeping around, you'll need to be aware of [the biggest household dangers](#) so you can [childproof your home](#).

A few pieces of [safety equipment](#) can help protect your baby from many common hazards.

Safety gates: If you have stairs, invest in [safety gates](#) for the top and bottom. You can also use a gate to block off areas of the house that might be perilous, such as the bathroom or kitchen.

Outlet covers: Exposed outlets are an almost irresistible attraction to curious explorers. Bottom line: Keep them covered.

Cupboard and drawer latches: Choose from several types, including ones that latch or twist open and closed. Tug at them to make sure they can withstand numerous tries by a determined toddler.

Toilet seat locks: Babies can drown in as little as 2 inches of water, so keep your baby and his toys out of the toilet with a lock. The lock fastens on top of a closed seat and requires you to press a button or undo a latch to open it.

Baby monitor: These gadgets come with a transmitter and at least one receiver and allow you to keep tabs on your baby while you're in another room. The transmitter needs to be close enough to your baby's crib to pick up sounds (within 10 feet) but far enough away to ensure that the cord's out of reach if there is one. You can [choose](#) a basic audio model or a more expensive video monitor that lets you see your baby.

Health

First-aid kit: See what to keep in your [first-aid kit](#).

Bulb syringe: Use with saline drops to [clear your baby's stuffy nose](#).

Teething toys: Chewing on these can ease your baby's discomfort during [teething](#).

Digital thermometer: This is an important item to have in your [medicine chest](#).

Baby nail scissors or clippers: These help you [trim your baby's nails](#) safely.

Baby-friendly laundry detergent: Some brands are specially formulated to be gentle on baby skin, although brands for sensitive skin are fine too.

Soft-bristled baby brush: This is especially helpful for handling [cradle cap](#).

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