

Caring for Cloth

by Robin at Duzins

We all know cloth diapers are better for the environment. Disposables make up about 2% of solid waste in landfills, but are 30% of the non-biodegradable waste (well, one unnamed company says their diapers are biodegradable, but when pressed they admit it will take almost 2 million years for this to happen). Solid human waste in landfills may seep into local groundwaters and is illegal in most landfills. Most disposable diapers have directions on their box instructing you to dump solid waste into the toilet... Does anyone really do this?

We all know cloth diapers prevent most diaper rash and are more comfortable for baby. And, most of us know the dangers of disposables. No independent studies have been done on the long-term effects of the chemicals used in diapers. Sodium Polyacrylate is the "super-absorbent gel" (absorbs 100x its weight in liquid), that shows up as little crystals on your baby's skin. It has also been found in the urinary tract of babies and has caused severe diaper rash and bleeding in perineal and scrotal tissue in some babies. It literally draws ALL moisture away from the genital area. This chemical was also linked to Toxic Shock Syndrome in tampons and is therefore no longer used in their production. Is this something you want in touch with your child's genitals the first vulnerable few years of life?

By-products of diapers, organochlorines, are still in the diaper in trace amounts. These are chlorinated toxic chemicals. Some countries outlaw the use of chlorine-bleached paper goods and use hydrogen peroxide instead, especially in diapers. We don't. Also, polyvinyl chloride (PVC) outgasses vinyl chloride, which is recognized by the EPA as a health hazard. Have you every smelled a disposable diaper?

And, we all know the financial savings associated with cloth diapers. From birth to potty training (which usually comes later in children using disposables), you will have spent about \$2,184.00 for 9,100 diaper changes at about 24 cents each, that is for each child you have! Depending on which cloth diapering system you buy, you can spend anywhere from \$300-\$900 for multiple children (most supplies last for three children). With cloth you spend a fraction of the cost. So why don't we all use cloth???

I know it is not because we don't care. I think we are some of the most caring mommies (and daddies) I know.

I realise that many of us are fearful of starting something that so many of our peers disdain. So, why are we scared? It is not because we mind being different. We are the ladies who breastfed when noone else did... We are the ladies who don't routinely circumcise and who question vaccinations. So, why the hesitance for cloth?

Sometimes the scariest part about going to cloth is the fact that no one knows how to care for cloth diapers. Some diapers need special care, and some need harsh detergent. Contrary to popular opinion, no diapers need bleach. It voids your guarantee on most diapers and covers and usually destroys your diapers. If you are hesitant about introducing your family to cloth, read on. Hopefully, these instructions can be the catalyst to begin your journey in the wonderful world of cloth.

Caring for your diapers:

Wash First: Your diapers won't absorb properly unless washed and dried a minimum of 3 times before use. This may seem needless, but if you put a brand new diaper on a child and he/she wets it, it will simply bead up and run right out of the diaper. The washing swells and fluffs the cotton fibers maximizing your absorbency. This is especially true of terry.

A prewash with vinegar is an excellent way to reduce future stains. Vinegar "sets" the fabric and may prevent staining altogether. I would do the first wash on cold with one cup vinegar only. I would then follow with three warm or hot washes with detergent and a run in the dryer after each of these three washes.

Soiled Diapers:

a. **Wet Method** (can either rinse pooped diapers in the toilet or soak them in the pail): Fill diaper pail $\frac{1}{4}$ full COLD water and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Borax, baking soda or vinegar. Keep lid closed and away from curious toddlers. This is one of those times a locking pail is recommended. Just dump in diapers after shaking any poop into the toilet. Some moms "flush" diaper to get all poop off (you can use rubber gloves or a Diaper Duck or just wash hands well afterwards). No liner in pail is necessary. On wash day, which should be 1 or 2x a week, either wring out diapers and throw in washer or dump in everything into washer. Rinse out pail w/some water and bleach or vinegar and water. Run through a spin cycle to get rid of water. No need to run pre-soak cycle. Run one cold wash with Arm and Hammer Heavy Duty detergent.

Follow with another wash on longest cycle HOT and COLD rinse w/detergent (Arm & Hammer Heavy Duty is a good choice) and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Borax or Arm and Hammer Washing Soda. NO BLEACH (This will damage your diapers in the long run and is never recommended. It also voids your guarantee). Run through second rinse cycle in COLD water with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup vinegar (use a Downy ball w/vinegar in it for the rinse cycle). Put diapers in dryer for at least 60 minutes or hang in the sun. (If diapers get stiff in sun, after they've dried, put in dryer w/damp washcloth for a few minutes to soften). NO FABRIC SOFTENERS (check your detergent too. Some contain fabric softener.). This will put a coating of a wax-like substance on your diapers (and covers) and make them less absorbent and water

resistant! This too is BAD for your diapers. It makes them have NO absorbency.

b. Some moms like to run through an additional cycle HOT/COLD w/no detergent. If diapers smell clean and fresh, then they are. If at any time they don't or the urine smells really strong after your baby pees in them, then your diapers need first aid! You can then put 1 cup of vinegar in rinse cycle to get out the uric acid. If stained, hang in sun w/diluted lemon juice on stain. You would be amazed at how good this is at getting out stains!

c. Dry Method (w/out having to rinse diapers): Preferably use disposable/flushable liners in diapers. That way, just throw soiled liner in toilet and only a urine stained diaper will go in pail. It's ok to put diapers in pail w/some poop on them if the flushable liner doesn't catch it all. Keep lid closed. You might also drop in a deodisk. They are wonderful and non-toxic. With exclusively breastfed babies or until your babies have more solid poops, use the wet method. Wash at least 2x a week.

Take diapers, put in machine with ¼ cup Borax and pre-soak in COLD water for about 20 min. Then wash with detergent on longest cycle w/HOT wash and COLD rinse. Go through a second rinse cycle in COLD water with ¼ cup vinegar. Put it dryer at least 60 minutes or hang in sun. Done!

Other Helpful Hints

- a. Every fourth wash or so, put 3 TBS Castile Soap in w/your diapers to keep them very soft. Don't do this too often, as it could affect absorbability. It will condition the fibers of the cotton.
- b. If your baby doesn't want to lie still for diaper changes, give him a piece of masking tape to play with or a forbidden toy (I find the remote control is great for diaper changes)

Care for covers:

You don't have to wash your covers every time you change baby. Covers will last longer if you rotate with changes allowing to dry in between. I wash mine every 2 weeks or when soiled. Machine wash in warm water using any detergent without softener included (check the labels, you may be surprised to find your detergent is loaded with it). Hand washing is ok too. Dry with your dryer on low heat or hang to dry (hanging inside over a chair takes only a few hours, but hanging outside is faster). NEVER put your covers on high heat as this may cause cracking and may decrease waterproofness. NEVER PUT WOOL COVERS IN THE DRYER!!!

Care for your Wool Covers:

NEVER PUT YOUR WOOL COVERS IN THE DRYER. These have to be hand washed (every 2-3 weeks or when soiled) with woolite (or something like this) in warm water. Gently shake water off and run HOT water in sink. Soak for 15 minutes in very

warm water and treat with Eucolan wool wash or with USP modified lanolin. If you use Eucolan, simply pour it into a spray bottle and spray each cover thoroughly. {If you use lanolin (like Lansinoh or PureLan) just put ¼ cup into a large spray bottle and water. Heat spray bottle in the microwave to thin the lanolin so that you can spray it on the diapers. Shake well using oven mitts. Spray on diapers.} Dunk into the hot water once again and very gently squeeze the water out (don't wring). Lay covers between towels and roll up to remove more water. Lay flat to dry (not in direct sunlight as this may cause felting).

Wool may take a little more care, but it is soooo worth it! Not only is it a wonderful leak proof cover for night use, but it is so comfortable for day use too. And, this is really not too much work for every two weeks (can't imagine having to do this every time I washed diapers though!)

I hope this information has been helpful. Please feel free to email me directly at Robyn@Duzins.com or call me toll free at 877-7Diaper if you need any assistance with your cloth diapers. I feel it is the responsibility of those of us who are "experts" at cloth to mentor parents just starting out.

HAPPY DIAPERING!!!

Robyn's website is at: <http://www.duzins.com>