



The Infant's First Clothes

Betty Feather
Clothing and Textiles Specialist

You or someone you know is planning to have a baby. What kind and how many clothes will you need? Buying what your friend purchased for her newborn may not be the answer. The time of the year the baby is born influences the amount and type of clothing purchased. Fewer clothes, in variety and amount, are needed in the summer than other seasons.

Family Affects Clothing Needs

The number and order of family members influences infant clothing needs. Whether the infant is a first, second or third child will determine what clothes need to be acquired. Generally, a total wardrobe must be obtained for a first child and succeeding children are in line for hand-me-downs.

Family activities, responsibilities and household facilities affect clothing decisions and purchases. Families that are active in community affairs or travel may need more as well as a greater variety of garments. Mothers who plan to continue working outside the home after the baby's arrival should probably plan to purchase more garments than those who plan to stay at home. Skills, energy and abilities vary—these need to be considered when making clothing purchases. Availability of laundry services will probably be one of the most influential factors in determining the type and amount of infant clothes purchased.

Infants' basic clothing needs are for comfort and safety. Comfort factors include dryness, warmth, non-irritating fabrics and fasteners as well as ample room for moving. Adjusting layers of clothing helps control thermal comfort. Due to a greater amount of skin area in proportion to body weight infants are very sensitive to temperature and humidity changes. Additional clothing is needed due to frequent diapering and clothes soiling. Knits and napped fabrics are much softer than plain wovens. The infant is easier to dress when the garment opens flat.



Characteristics of the Newborn Infant

- The average weight is 7-8½ pounds (3.2-3.8 kilos). Some infants weigh less than 5 pounds or more than 10 (2.3-4.5 kilos).
- The average length is approximately 19-21 inches (47.5-52.5 cm).
- The newborn's body proportions differ greatly from older children and adults. The head is proportionally larger, there is very little neck and no waistline.
- At birth, the infant lacks muscle control and is not capable of controlling body processes nor movement.
- Activities of most infants are limited to sleeping and eating.

The Infant's Clothing

Infant's growth and development are rapid. Many infants double and sometimes triple their weight in six months. Thereafter, growth decreases but both mental and physical development continue to be rapid. These factors affect clothing purchases as infants quickly outgrow garments. Purchase larger garments to ensure longer use.

There is no prescribed amount of necessary clothing but these suggestions will help provide some guidelines. Collect only those items the infant will need the first month or two. Avoid purchasing a packaged layette as several items may not be needed. It is important to have enough clothing for everyday needs.

- 4-6 undershirts
 - 3-4 nightgowns or stretch coveralls
 - 1 sweater and cap (may not need in hot weather)
 - 3-4 receiving blankets
 - 1 convertible comforter-bunting
 - 3-5 dozen diapers
 - 3 pair of waterproof pants
 - 4-6 diaper pins
- } if cloth diapers are used regularly

Consider the many sources available when purchasing clothes. Infants outgrow clothing rather than wear them out so the best quality is frequently not essential. Compare prices in department, specialty and discount stores. Garage sales frequently have excellent purchases. It is not uncommon to purchase items that have never been used. Often infant clothing is loaned or traded for other items. Baby gifts are often another source of clothing.

Diaper Comparisons

Diapers will undoubtedly be the most costly item in the budget. Proctor and Gamble (manufacturers of Pampers and Luv disposable diapers) estimates the child wears diapers for an average of 28 months and uses an average of 42 diapers per week or 4704 diapers.

Basically, there are three choices: 1) buy cloth diapers and launder them at home or laundromat; 2) use a diaper service; 3) buy disposable diapers. The least expensive route is cloth diapers laundered at home. Using the laundromat for cloth diapers is more costly than at home and not as convenient. Diaper service competes very closely with the price of disposable diapers, both are more expensive than home-laundered cloth diapers if one does not place a value on personal labor.

If the cloth diaper route is selected, there are basically two types of diaper fabrics on the market—gauze and birdseye. There is less difference in the diaper fabrics today than in previous years.

Birdseye used to be heavier, more absorbent and had a



distinct diamond weave. Today it more closely resembles the gauze weave. Gauze is absorbent, quick drying and not bulky. Diapers need to be changed frequently and should not be worn until completely saturated with moisture. Both fabrics should perform adequately.

The type of diaper fabric appears to be of less concern to consumers than the diaper form. Diapers are available in a variety of forms such as flat, pre-fold, stretch flat and stretch pre-fold. Flat diapers can be folded for a closer fit, but require more labor in smoothing and folding. Pre-folds save time and the stretch factor improves fit. Pre-folds take longer to dry than the flat diapers. The best selling cloth diaper is gauze, stretch pre-folds.

To compare costs of various forms of diapers several factors should be considered. Cloth diapers may not be as inexpensive as you think if all factors are considered—*diaper supplies* (initial cost of diapers, waterproof pants, diaper pins and pail), *cost of laundry products* (detergent, bleach, fabric softener, diaper pail conditioner), *cost of operating washer and dryer* (electricity, water, fuel to heat water and dry clothes, maintenance and depreciation), and *cost of personal time*. In addition to the fee for diaper service other expenses may include diapering supplies such as waterproof pants, diaper pins and diaper pail conditioner.

Human factors need to be considered in the decision making process. Time and energy is limited just as money is limited. With many mothers working outside the home, a new baby brings greater demands on one's time. Individuals may prefer to prepare their meals at home, do their own housecleaning and purchase disposable diapers. Rather than spend time doing the diaper laundry, individuals may choose to spend that time enjoying the infant. Another factor to consider is baby-sitters may prefer disposable diapers.

In the last decade, disposable diapers have become very popular. Infants feel drier longer with disposable diapers than cloth diapers. This is due to the very absorbent inner-diaper layer. The layer next to the infant is

non-absorbent, therefore the moisture passes through to the inner layer which will eventually be saturated. The use of disposable diapers does not necessarily decrease the number of changes necessary in a 24-hour period. The outer plastic layer eliminates the need for waterproof pants. Recent improvements include the use of adhesive tape replacing diaper pins and elasticizing the edge of the diaper providing a better fit around the leg.

Other Layette Items

Waterproof pants are essential if you use cloth diapers. The better quality waterproof pants remain soft and flexible as well as maintain good elasticity around the legs and waist. Duralite 100 percent nylon waterproof pants have those characteristics. They are slightly more expensive initially but give longer service. Inexpensive plastic pants do not hold up as well. Snap-on pants that open flat are easier for changing the small infant. As the child becomes larger the pull-on variety is best. Waterproof pants should be machine washable to be fresh and pliable as possible. Generally, line drying is advisable.



Undershirts provide protection from sudden temperature changes. To make dressing easier the first shirts should be double-breasted and open flat. To increase comfort many shirts have seamless sides and underarms. A shirt is one item that can be purchased a little large and not create a problem. Buy the six-months size for the newborn. As the infant grows, the second set of shirts may

be over-the-head type which feature easy on and off necklines. Shirts are now available in pastels and prints.

Pilucho is an all-in-one garment suitable for warm or hot weather. It is a combination shirt and diaper cover. The garment opens flat, snaps at the waist and top resembling a romper suit. The pilucho can be used as either an outer or undergarment and is available in pastels and prints.



Sleepwear is used extensively the first six months in various forms—the nightgown, all-in-one garment and the blanket sleeper. Some individuals prefer to use the nightgown for a short time. Gowns that open partially down the front are fairly easy to put on. Extra features include mitten cuffs that cover the hands for additional warmth or prevent scratching, and closed hemline.

The one-piece stretch coverall is the most practical and popular of all infant wear. Look for seamless, floating shoulders; ample seats for diaper space; square feet; and snap front, crotch and legs for easy dressing. Sizes vary from brand to brand. If possible, ask to see a sample garment to judge the size. There is considerable inconsistency of infant sizing.

Blanket sleepers are available in sleeping bags as well as footed sleepers. Sleeping bags can be effective for additional warmth before the infant stands or walks; then they become a hazard.

Children's sleepwear according to law must be fire



resistant (FR) from sizes 0 to 14. Currently, almost all of the fabrics are fire resistant without the addition of surface finishes. This is the reason that most of the sleepwear garments are polyester, modacrylic, nylon and Kohjin Cordelan matrix fiber rather than cotton or triacetate.

To ensure FR performance follow the care label procedures. Care instructions recommend detergent rather than soap because soap leaves a fatty deposit that masks the fire resistant characteristics. Chlorine bleach should not be used in the laundry process for similar reasons.

Bibs are worn to protect garments from moisture and soil. An absorbent surface such as terry cloth with a vinyl backing will prevent moisture from soaking into the undergarment. Gripper snaps are preferred to string ties because ties get wet, knot, break and are frequently too short. Select machine-washable bibs for cleanliness and easy care. As the child grows, larger bibs are needed.

Sweaters and head gear will probably be needed most of the year, except for the warmest portion of the summer. Head protection is needed in cold weather to retain body warmth and in hot weather to protect the infant from the sun. At 60° (15C) approximately 1/3 of the body is lost through the head; but at 5F (-15C) as much as 3/4 is lost. Due to a greater proportion of skin area to body weight, infants are very susceptible to temperature change. Sweaters and head coverings are a good way to control this.

For the newborn infant plan to have one sweater and a cap or hood. Additional sweaters are frequently gifts or can be purchased later. Hoods are more flexible than a cap because it provides neck protection and is conveniently attached to the sweater.

Synthetic sweaters of acrylics and nylon are machine washable and dryable. They are available in a variety of prices.

Receiving blankets are one of the most useful items in the infant's layette. They serve many purposes—a warm

wrapping after a bath, a light covering to go outside in mild weather, a lightweight crib blanket or protection for the lap or shoulder while holding the infant. Three receiving blankets are a minimum. Receiving blankets can be made of cotton or synthetic blends. They are also available in thermal knits or other wovens. If the blanket has a binding, select nylon bindings because they wear well and shrink less than cotton or rayon bindings.

Buntings have been replaced by polyfil crib comforters that zip to form a sleeping bag. This is a major improvement over the blanket bunting which didn't fit most infants and laundered poorly. The new product can be used as a cover for the crib. Buntings will generally only be needed for fall and winter infants as spring and summer infants will be ready for pramsuits when the weather becomes cold.

Pramsuits are infant snowsuits that are usually worn between six and 18 months old. It is important that the garment be machine washable and dryable for convenience and usefulness. Generally, pramsuits are one piece with two full-length front zippers for easy dressing. Attached hoods are warm and stay in place. Check the lining fabric and fiberfill content. Nylon, polyester, acrylic are better than rayon and triacetate. Mittens and booties that button in place are frequently part of the pramsuit.





Care of Infant Clothing

Stains should be removed before laundry. Most infant stains are protein related (except vegetables and fruits) and are best treated with cool water. Hot water will set the stains and make it more difficult or impossible to remove. Spray stain removers are designed basically for fatty stains and are not that effective on protein.

Here are suggested treatments for common infant stains.

Formula—Soak in mixture of 1 quart lukewarm water, 1/2 teaspoon detergent and 1 tablespoon ammonia. Blot to absorb stain. Soak in same solution for 15 minutes. Rinse with water. Soak in mixture of 1 quart warm water and 1 tablespoon enzyme product for 30 minutes. Wash.

Baby foods—Soak in mixture of 1 quart warm water, 1/2 teaspoon detergent and 1 tablespoon white vinegar 15 minutes. Rinse with water. Sponge with alcohol. Wash. Soak in mixture of 1 quart warm water and 1 tablespoon enzyme product 30 minutes. Wash. Color stains can be removed by using a chlorine bleach solution.

Diaper stains/vomit—Soak in mixture of 1 quart lukewarm water, 1/2 teaspoon detergent and 1 tablespoon ammonia. Blot to absorb stain. Soak in same solution for 15 minutes. Rinse with water. Soak in mixture of 1 quart warm water and 1 tablespoon enzyme product for 30 minutes. Wash.

For additional stain problems, ask for MP37, "Stain Removal From Washable Fabrics," from your local extension office.

Baby laundry is generally separated into diapers and other baby clothing. Home laundered diaper care includes the following steps:

- Rinse the soiled diaper in the toilet.
- Rinse again in cold water.
- Soak in cold water in diaper pail, add diaper additive according to directions.
- Wring diapers out.
- Dissolve detergent in hot water, fill washer with diapers.
- If there seems to be detergent in the diapers an extra rinse cycle would be advisable.
- Fabric softener may be used in the rinse or dry cycle.*
- Tumble dry.
- Smooth and fold.

* Constant use of fabric softener decreases absorbency so periodically omit for improved absorbency.

The remainder of the baby's laundry can be sorted and laundered with the rest of the family wash, according to fabric, color and degree of soil. Some persons may prefer to wash infant's clothes separately. Using warm water wash should provide adequate cleaning and save energy.

References

- Chambers, Helen G. and Verna Moulton. *Clothing Selection*, 2nd ed. New York, J. B. Lippincott Company, c 1969.
- “Diapering Cost-Comparison Project”, Proctor-Gamble, #241-8967, 1978.
- “Disposable Diapers.” *Consumers' Research Magazine*, January 1979, pp. 7-12.
- Williams, Kim. “Infants Wear.” (slides and script) Iowa State University, 1976.

Mention of specific products does not imply recommendation or endorsement, nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.