



Eco Parenting Guide

By: Laura Trotta (B.Eng (Environmental), M.Sc (Environmental Chemistry))

With all the information and must-have products out there for first-time parents, it's no surprise that many are simply overwhelmed. From receipt of the first 'Bounty Bag' to being inundated with baby shower gifts, those wishing to lead an eco-friendly lifestyle often feel compromised with the accumulation of goods that tends to accompany becoming a parent in the 21st century.

The good news is that parenting need not exponentially increase your environmental footprint or family expenditure. With a little planning, organisation and adjustment of expectations you can keep waste in the following main areas of infant environmental impact to a minimum.

Nappies: The waste problem of disposable nappies cannot be denied. Just under 4 million nappies are disposed of daily to landfill in Australia and New Zealand and many of these take up to 500 years to break down. With the average baby soiling approximately 5300 nappies¹ prior to toilet training, cloth nappies make both economical and environmental sense. Choosing modern cloth nappies will significantly reduce your household waste and save you approximately \$2500 per child all for the time investment of just five minutes a day². To further reduce the environmental impact of nappy changes, use an eco-friendly laundry detergent in a front-loading washing machine, line dry your nappies and ditch the disposable wipes (use flannels and water instead).

Feeding (milk): Breastmilk is a true eco food. With no food miles, industrial manufacturing or packaging, it is food for your baby as designed by nature. If breastfeeding is not an option for you, try to use formula manufactured from organic farming practices where cows are farmed on pastures grown without use of chemical herbicides and pesticides.

Feeding (solids): You only have to stroll down the baby food aisle in your supermarket to see the wide selection of first food available, many of little nutritional value. When it comes to baby food, convenience does cost the earth. Commercial baby food has used resources in its processing, packaging and transport to the consumer and creates a waste when disposed. Where possible, make your own baby food from fresh, local and preferably organic ingredients. There are many great cookbooks out there for inspiration. Endeavour to have your baby eating family food by 12 months, or earlier! This minimises energy used to cook multiple meals, makes life simpler for the household chef and helps the toddler feel accepted into the family.



Clothing: With the fast rate that babies grow, it's little wonder that many of the garments you will purchase may be obsolete before their first wash! For this reason, many infant clothes in opportunity shops, or hand-me-downs from family and friends, are in as-new condition. If you are handy with a sewing machine, consider making some baby clothes by "upcycling" some of your old clothes into trendy baby outfits. If you can't suppress the urge to shop for gorgeous baby outfits, try to buy fewer garments of better quality made from eco-friendly fibres such as organically grown

cotton, bamboo, merino and soybean. Steer clear of polyesters and other man-made fibres which are more energy intensive to produce and may not be as 'breathable' as natural fibres. If you plan on having multiple children, invest in a few good quality unisex items for maximum wear.



Toys: Nowhere is our throw-away society culture more obvious than in the toy section of your local department store. Plastic toys are primarily made from oil, a non-renewable resource. When it comes to toys, you are your baby's favourite; play, talk and sing to your baby. When they are looking to interact with inanimate objects, invest in good quality toys made from sustainable materials (e.g. plantation wood, organic cotton, wool, natural rubber) that will survive more than one child and avoid battery-operated toys, which cause a waste problem in themselves. Encourage outdoor and creative play, create toys out of everyday household items, join your local toy library or swap and share toys among friends.

Chemical Use: Hundreds of chemicals are present in the average modern household from cosmetics through to kitchen, laundry and bathroom cleaners. While avoiding chemicals totally in our modern world is difficult, try to actively reduce your child's exposure in the home through diet (eat less processed foods and more organically grown wholefoods) and direct contact (choose natural and organic baby body products such as barrier balms and bath wash over commercial varieties). The use of natural and eco friendly cleaning agents such as bicarb soda will ensure your household is not a sterile, toxic environment.

The above information details just some of the ways you can minimise your environmental footprint as a parent. For regular inspiration and information on eco-parenting from a team of environmental professionals and mums, be sure to follow the [Sustainababy Blog](#).

Good luck with your green parenting journey!

About the author: *Laura Trotta (nee McIlwaine) is an eco mum, environmental engineer and founder of [Sustainababy](#). She holds a Bachelor of Environmental Engineering and Masters of Science (Environmental Chemistry) and has over ten years experience working as an environmental professional. She is passionate about helping parents lead a more sustainable lifestyle.*

References:

1. Assuming, a baby uses about 10 nappies per day for the first 3 months and then an average of 6 nappies per day for the next 24 months, with an average cost of 50c per nappy.
2. http://www.dialanappy.com/docs/Darebin_Nappy_Trial_July2007.pdf