

Cots

Features to Look for.

Drop sides - one or both of the cot sides drop for you to put down and pick up your baby more easily. One or two handed drop - check whether you need one or two hands to operate the mechanism that drops the side; go for one handed designs if you can, because you will invariably have the baby in your other arm.

Teething rails - once he can stand, your baby may try out his new teeth on the top of the cot. Plastic strips along the wooden edge will protect your baby from getting a mouthful of splinters, and the cot from being damaged.

Mattress base height - look for adjustable levels, usually two or three, where the mattress sits in the cot. You start with the mattress at the top for easy access and then lower it as your baby grows, finishing on the lowest height when your baby is sitting up or standing.

Castors - some cots are sold with castors which make it easier to move around for cleaning. If the cot does have castors ensure they are lockable, otherwise an energetic baby might make the cot move around.

Play features - something like wooden playbeads set into the cot ends will make it attractive to look at and fun for your baby, but these aren't essential as you can easily attach toys to the cot.

Cot toys You can buy toys specifically designed to attach to the cot, for example cot activity centres which strap on the side for sitting and standing babies to play with; musical mobiles; and music and lights centres which attach to the cot and play nursery tunes and project colourful moving images onto the wall or ceiling.

Cot lights You can also buy a soft light attachment that goes on the side of the cot to soothe a baby and/or help parents to see in the dark for feeding or nappy changing.

Cot alarms and monitors There is a range of monitors available which allow you to monitor your baby's sounds or even breathing patterns from another part of the house.

Bedding Your baby's sleeping needs will change quite quickly as he grows - it's useful to have your newborn baby in a portable, snug sleeping place such as a Moses basket or pram carrycot, so that you can move him without waking him. But once he reaches four to six months he will need to move into a cot. Over the first year the very least you will need is a cot, mattress and bedding. As a rough guide you will probably need four bottom and four top sheets plus two to four blankets for a Moses basket, carrycot or crib, and four bottom and four top sheets plus three to four blankets for a cot. You will still need to buy sheets and blankets even if later on your baby will sleep under a duvet. Experts now advise that babies under one year should not use duvets or quilts as there is a danger of both suffocation and overheating.

When to buy a cot Newborn babies can sleep in a cot straight away, but most parents prefer to wait until their baby is around four to six months old before moving them into a cot. While there is a lot to be said for getting organised before the baby is born, a cot is one purchase that you could leave until things have settled down after the birth. You can expect your baby to sleep in a cot until he's at least 18 months old, and up to when he's 3 years old, depending on his size and his adventurous nature - once a toddler starts to try and climb out of a cot, he's outgrown it.

Key points to consider The size of the cot, taking into account your baby's size, growth and how long you hope to use it. Think about the size of the room where the cot is going and where you plan to put it in the room What sort of mattress to buy. Your chosen cot is unlikely to have a mattress included in the price, although several cot manufacturers also make mattresses and may recommend that you buy their brand Will it co-ordinate? Some cot manufacturers make matching nursery furniture and you may want to choose a co-ordinating range

Mattresses for cots and cot beds are usually sold separately, although some cot manufacturers also make mattresses and may recommend that you buy one of theirs. Mattresses are also available for Moses baskets and pram carrycots although these may sometimes be included in the price. Many mattresses are now a blend of layers using different materials to give comfort and support as well as breathability. A few years ago mattresses came under the spotlight as a possible contributory factor towards cot death, due to the fire retardant chemicals used in their manufacture. Since then, government research bodies have not found any link. But while this episode subsequently cleared the name of mattresses, it shook up the manufacturing industry into rethinking the design of baby mattresses and making a lot of improvements. It also made people more aware of the importance of putting your baby to bed in the correct (Feet to Foot) position, and preventing your baby from overheating in the cot; two factors which are thought to reduce the risk of cot death. What's in a mattress? · Foam interior - foam mattresses usually have holes to provide ventilation at the head end and have a half mesh/half PVC cover. Foam is inexpensive compared to other mattresses and usually non-allergenic · Coir - the modern day replacement for horse hair, this is coconut fibre which is latex covered then wrapped in polyester or wool. The mattress is usually covered with a breathable, water repellent fabric · Spring interior - traditional coiled springs, surrounded by padding, then covered in a PVC, fabric or water-repellent cover. Considered durable and supportive

Mattress Buying tips For the sake of hygiene always buy a new mattress for a new baby Have the internal dimensions of your cot to hand when you go shopping; mattresses must be a snug fit in the cot to avoid the baby getting his head or another part of his body trapped in the gap. The gap between the cot and the edge of the mattress should be no more than 4cm Check that the mattress isn't too deep: the distance between the top of the mattress and the top of the cot should be a minimum of 50cm when the cot's mattress base is in the lowest position and a minimum of 20cm when the base is in the highest position Think about the content of the mattress - if there's a family history of allergy you may opt for a simple foam one. Most of the well known brands offer good quality foam mattresses; don't be tempted to buy a cheaper, unbranded mattress or you may find it dents after just a few months use. If you want a mattress that's more supportive as your baby grows, you might choose a sprung interior mattress with foam padding What is the mattress covered with? PVC will be easy to clean, but will not absorb heat and moisture. Some mattresses now have wipe clean, breathable covers which don't encourage perspiration How easy is it to keep clean? Some foam mattresses have ventilated sections which are good for keeping your baby cool and dry, but can collect milky dribbles which make them difficult to clean. Look for removable sections which can be washed Some manufacturers now make mattresses with two ventilated sections: one at the head and one half way down, so that when a small baby is tucked into the cot in the Feet to Foot position, his head is still over a ventilated area.

Protecting your mattress If you choose a mattress that doesn't have a waterproof cover you may want to buy a plastic sheet to protect the mattress from wetting. Choose one with a plastic central panel and mesh outsides for increased breathability

and to avoid overheating. Alternatively, for toddlers and young children, you can use a 'top cover' protective sheet that lies over the top of the bedsheet. These are waterproof and made of soft, absorbent materials - and toddlers enjoy sleeping on them.

Pillows are also dangerous for babies under one year, and may not be necessary until your child is three or four years old. If you have a baby who tends to wriggle out of his bedding or kick it off, or you use a travel cot a lot, it may be worth considering buying a baby sleeping bag. The bag is designed so that the fabric cannot ride up over his face. Sheets and blankets are generally sold in standard sizes, but it's helpful to know the dimensions of your equipment in centimetres before you shop.

Sheets - what's available · Fitted cotton interlock - a 100 per cent cotton soft sheet, shaped and gathered on elastic to fit round the mattress · Fitted stretch terry - usually 80 per cent cotton/20 per cent polyester soft, fine towelling type fabric, shaped and gathered on elastic to go round the mattress · Flat flannelette - a 100 per cent cotton soft, fine sheet, like brushed cotton to touch, not fitted, to use either as a bottom sheet over the mattress or as a warm top sheet under blankets · Flat sheet - a cotton/polyester mix, cotton feel sheet, not fitted, to go over the mattress or under blankets

Blankets - what's available · Cellular cotton - a 100 per cent cotton, plain, open weave blanket · Cellular acrylic & cotton rich - acrylic/nylon mix or cotton/polyester mix, plain open weave blanket with ribbon edge · Wool & fleece - 100 per cent wool, traditional close weave blanket. When choosing your blankets bear in mind that your baby may become very attached to one in particular and want to sleep with it every night for the next five or more years. If he starts to show signs of a favourite, buy a spare while you still can in case the original gets lost.

What to look for in second-hand cots If it's a fairly new cot, has it got its manufacturer's instructions? Is it robust, clean and without any rough edges, protruding corners, nails or screws? Is the space between the bars no more than 6cm, to avoid heads and limbs getting stuck? Are the sides high enough? The distance between the top of the mattress and the top of the cot should be a minimum of 50cm when the cot's mattress base is in the lowest position and a minimum of 20cm when the base is in the highest position. Are there any horizontal bars? These are dangerous as they may allow a baby to climb up and possibly fall out. If there's a drop side has it got a child-proof fastener? Is the paint and finish non-toxic and lead-free?

Cotbeds These are bigger cots which turn into small first beds for a toddler by removing the sides. Their advantage is that they will have a longer life than most standard cots, but they do take up more space and can be a more expensive option. They may not have a drop-side mechanism when in cot mode, which means you have to lift up and put down your baby over the side of the cot.

Travel Cots Travel cots are essential for any parents on the move, whether spending a day at a friend's or granny's house or going abroad. Having a travel cot means your baby can sleep or rest in a familiar environment away from home. There are four main types of travel cot to look out for: Travel cot in a bag Travel cot playpen Bassinette travel cot Folding cot Travel cot in a bag. What most people understand as a travel cot is a sturdy fabric cot on a frame, which folds down into an oblong shape and packs away into a zip-up travel bag with carry handles. This type of travel cot fits easily into the boot of a car or with the luggage when travelling. Depending on style and make, a travel cot might weigh from 8 to 12kg. Features to look for · The quality of the

mattress that comes with the cot · Are fabric covers removable for washing? Or will they wipe clean? · Is at least one side made from mesh, to enable you and your baby to see in and out? · Is there a roll-down blind to cover the mesh when you want to make the cot darker for sleep? · How easy is it to erect and fold down? Ask the retailer to give you a demonstration before buying · Are the erecting and folding instructions printed on the cot fabric? Useful if it's a complicated procedure

Travel cot playpen Some travel cots are now designed to double up as playpens, but they have to be extra sturdy to fulfil this second role. A travel cot playpen sometimes comes with a toy tidy or detachable toy flaps included in the price.

Bassinette travel cot This is a travel cot which has the added feature of a special insert (bassinette) which allows a newborn baby to sleep much nearer the top of the cot. The bassinette is usually only suitable for use up to 3 months age or around 6kg baby weight. After that you use the travel cot in the usual way.

Folding cot If you'll only need a travel cot now and again, a folding cot may be a cheaper option. This is a fabric cot on a frame which folds flat for storage and is very quick and easy to put up and take down. It doesn't always come with a travel bag although some manufacturers sell them as an optional extra. It may not be as portable as other types of travel cot although it will usually fit into the boot of a car.

Special designs You can buy cots designed to meet specific needs. These include:

Bedside cot - if you plan to keep the baby next to you at night and feed him in bed, you might want to consider a cot which has an easily removable drop side so that it can sit right next to your bed and become an extension of it at night, or have the side back up for daytime sleep when your baby is alone

Corner cot - this has a bowed front and is designed to fit into the corner of a room. Useful if space is at a premium, or if you need to fit two cots into one room.

Rocking cot - a cot which has a gentle rocking motion to send a baby to sleep, or can be locked into static mode

Buying second-hand Old cots may be family heirlooms and lovely to look at, but they are unlikely to stand up to current rigorous safety standards. Prior to stricter safety standards being introduced, babies were able to squeeze their heads between cot bars, with fatal results, and injured themselves on protruding wood or metal parts. Even cots that are just a few years old may represent a hazard. Never buy a second-hand mattress, for the sake of hygiene.

Moses Baskets Moses baskets offer a snug, portable place for your baby to sleep. They have carry handles, which makes them practical for newborn and young babies as you can carry your sleeping baby around the house with you. It's also possible to buy a stand (usually sold separately) for the Moses basket so that you can raise your baby off the floor out of harm's way and away from draughts. Some stands are adjustable to fit the basket; if not, check the stand fits your basket snugly before buying. Most manufacturers recommend a Moses basket for babies up to 6 or 7kg; but once your baby begins to roll or simply overfills the basket, it's time to find a new sleeping place. Moses baskets are made from various materials, the most common being palm leaf. As this is a natural product these Moses baskets are often fumigated against palm lice by importers (they mostly come from North Africa and China) and stockists are given a fumigation certificate which you can ask to see if you are concerned. The palm lice are entirely harmless to humans but eat the baskets, and the fumigation process is non-toxic. What makes one Moses basket different from another is the dressing - the accessories that are often included in the total price of the basket. There is usually a valance piece which makes a pretty frill around the bottom, a liner, a mattress and co-ordinated bedding. Check that the mattress is a close fit (especially if you buy it separately). A good Moses basket should be very well padded, soft and cosy for your baby.

Swinging cribs These are cribs with a rocking motion to soothe

your baby. They often look very pretty and are small enough to fit into a parent's bedroom, but your baby is likely to outgrow them by the age of four to six months.

Cot Accessories Cot bumper This is a piece of padded fabric which attaches to the inside of the cot. It makes the cot look attractive, gives a young baby something interesting to focus on and helps keep the cot draught-free. However, there are concerns about the safety of cot bumpers on two points: first, the danger of suffocation or strangulation if they loosen and the baby's head comes into contact with them, and second, that by restricting the flow of air in and out of the cot they may contribute to the baby overheating. If you do use a bumper, ensure that the fabric ties which attach it are secured properly and out of your baby's reach, and that the room temperature is well controlled. A cot bumper should be removed altogether once a baby is sitting, as it may be used as a lever to climb out. Cot valance This goes under the mattress and hangs to the floor, and is designed to make the cot look more attractive. It also provides a covered storage area under the cot. Cot and crib drapes You can buy drapes and rods to make a canopy effect over the cot or crib. As with bumpers, you need to watch the temperature in the cot in case they make it too hot. Cot tidy This hangs on the outside of the cot, with fabric compartments to store toys and other bits and pieces.

Prams, Buggies, Carriers & Strollers

Information about prams and what you would like to consider before buying.

A pram or pushchair is a major item of expenditure so it is important to choose one that you will be happy with. Ideally it will be in service for the next couple of years and then possibly handed down to another baby, so it's worth taking time to shop around and find the one that best suits your lifestyle and budget. Your requirements will also change depending on the age of your baby and you may find that you need to buy another pushchair in the future as he grows older. It's a good idea to ask your friends and relatives about the pros and cons of the pushchairs they have chosen and to visit a big nursery equipment retailer for specialist advice. Also check out the baby magazines for tests of the latest models.

Buying the right Pram · Will it suit my lifestyle? If you do a lot of walking, you'll need a sturdy model with good suspension. If you rely on public transport, size, weight and portability are essential considerations. Check how quick and easy it is to fold for catching a bus or negotiating a flight of stairs. Bear in mind that if you live in the countryside or do a lot of walking you will need something more robust than if you travel mainly by car

The Double Buggy What is it? This is a pushchair designed for two children, and comes in a variety of styles: Tandem with one behind the other Tandem facing each other foot to foot Side-by-side with two pushchairs joined together Side-by-side with one very wide pushchair for two Is it for me? If you have twin babies a double pushchair is essential If you have a second baby quite quickly and the first child still needs a pushchair this is a good option These pushchairs can be heavy and awkward to manoeuvre, particularly with an older child on one side Side-by-side models may be too wide to fit through shop doors or even your own front door Tandem models are narrower and therefore easier to take into shops but they may be quickly outgrown if there's not enough leg room. Physically they tend to be less compact when collapsed Putting one child in front of another can help avoid fights and stops a toddler from poking a sleeping baby but the recline facility of one seat may be quite limited Conversely, compatible children may prefer the companionship of adjacent seats

All - terrain buggies - What to look for The three-wheel, chunky style of the original all-terrain pushchair has now become quite fashionable and the look has been copied by manufacturers who have not necessarily designed their pushchairs for true rough country use. If you just like the look, then these may be fine and may in fact be best for you if you intend to use the pushchair mostly in town or on pavements. However if you are looking for a true all-terrain pushchair for regular use on rough ground, you should avoid these and go for a light, robust frame, good suspension, weather-tightness and easy-to-clean fabrics. Consider the ease of folding and assembly, the recline options, the number and quality of accessories, the size when collapsed and any special features. The size of the wheels vary - the bigger the wheel the smoother the ride cross-country, but the less compact and convenient the pushchair is for transporting by car or use around town. Features and accessories may include raincover, suncover, travel bag, handle bar extensions/adjusters, foot muffs, liners, foot and/or handbrakes, car seat attachments, clip-on carrycot and wrist straps. Wrist straps can be used to ensure the pushchair doesn't run away from you, but you may find walking siblings liked to use this more than mums. An all-terrain pushchair is a three-wheel pushchair with pneumatic tyres designed to be used across all kinds of terrain's - not just pavements. They are a relatively new development and work in the same way as a mountain bike - using chunky tyres and added suspension to give a more comfortable ride and more manageable push across bumpy, rough terrains. Do I need one? You are only likely to need an all-terrain pushchair if your lifestyle means that you regularly take your child across rough or difficult terrain - beaches, country tracks, muddy lanes, country walks. You may also find them lighter and easier to use if you intend to jog while pushing a pushchair. All-terrain pushchairs often have a much longer wheel base and much bigger wheels than conventional pushchairs and this means they are not always very practical around town. They have pneumatic tyres which means you can get punctures. These tyres give a smoother ride cross-country but can just be added hassle if you are not likely to get much rough terrain use. Some all-terrain pushchairs fully recline or can have a carrycot attached and so are suitable from birth. However, cross-country use is inevitably pretty bumpy and most authorities suggest true, rough country use should not be considered until the child is three to four months old. Up until then, a baby carrier is probably more appropriate.

Slings Using a sling is an idea borrowed from other cultures where mothers carry their babies for much of the day. Several UK companies now manufacture slings adapted for a western lifestyle. They are usually made from a large swathe of thick fabric with some sort of fastening device - cloth straps and/or buckles. They are designed to carry the baby in the position you find most comfortable - front, back or hip. Certain positions are explained in their instructions, but the idea is to develop your own way of carrying, particularly once your baby is self-supporting.

Baby Carriers A baby carrier is useful for carrying your baby close to you when he needs comforting or won't settle, and for outings where a pram or pushchair is impractical. When you first try on a baby carrier it can seem fiddly, with a daunting number of straps, poppers, buckles or zips to master. But parents who are long term users of carriers agree that with familiarity and practice, using one becomes second nature. It's essential to try on a carrier before buying, just to get an idea of the fit. If you decide to buy your first baby carrier while you're pregnant, let your partner try it, and if it doesn't fit you well after the birth, check whether the shop will take it back.

Front carriers These are good for carrying a small baby close to you. You may find them useful for short shopping trips, around the house when you want to get on with chores, or if your baby won't settle. They are suitable from birth onwards as long as they support your baby's head, neck and back, and can be used until you find the weight is too much of a strain on your back.

Prams - Features to look for Different types of pram and pushchair have different design features but there are some things which apply to all of them. · Wheels Large, spoked wheels give a traditional pram look that many new mums love, but can make the pushchair bulkier and more difficult to move around and store when not in use. Chunky tyres are better for off-road use. Small and medium sized wheels that swivel improve manoeuvrability, but can be more difficult to control. Swivel wheels are often lockable for better control on gravel or bumpy ground · Brakes Brakes vary depending on the model. Check that they are quick and easy to apply · Handle height This needs to be comfortable for both you and your partner. Some pushchairs have an adjustable handle height · Harness All new pushchairs come with a five-point safety harness which fits over the shoulders, round the middle and between the legs. Check the clasp is easy for you to undo but difficult for a toddler · Cover Accidents are inevitable. Check whether the covers are removable, machine washable or sponge cleaned How well designed is it? Try to see beyond the pretty fabrics and cosy finishes. Examine the design, quality & innovative features · Will this be your only pushchair? Are you hoping it will suit your baby from newborn until he no longer needs a pushchair or are you planning to buy a second buggy when he's older? · What does the guarantee cover? Find out what sort of guarantee your pram or pushchair carries and how easy it is to get repairs done. Check if your retailer will lend you something while yours is being repaired · Ask for a full demonstration Some pushchairs and prams can be very complicated to put up and down before you get used to them. Try folding and unfolding it yourself, putting on any attachments and giving it a push around the shop · Is the instruction manual clear? Some are badly written and hard to follow, particularly those from other countries which have been translated into English · How big is it, folded and unfolded? Will it fit in the boot of your car? Will it fit through an average-sized door? Will your baby quickly outgrow it? · What accessories are included in the price? Some manufacturers make many of their accessories optional extras, which can mean that the price of a seemingly inexpensive pushchair suddenly starts to add up · Is it suitable for a newborn? A newborn baby needs to lie completely flat. The seat needs to have a full lie-back facility and the pushchair must be sturdy, padded, comfortable and, particularly for a winter baby, completely weatherproof · Can the seat face in either direction? Young babies usually like to face their parent but toddlers prefer to see where they are going

Back Carriers Back carriers are suitable for babies who can sit up and support themselves - usually from around 6 months old. Depending on how strong you are, and how tolerant your baby is, you may be able to use a back carrier into toddlerhood. Back carriers are useful for more serious walking where it's impractical to take a pushchair, for shopping trips where you need your hands free and as a possible alternative to the lightweight stroller pushchair on holiday. It's not a good idea to leave a sleeping baby in a carrier, even if it is freestanding, as they may move and topple the structure. Points to look for · A freestanding carrier makes lifting your baby in and out much easier · It must have a fixed harness inside · It should be well padded for both parent and baby · Detachable rain and sun covers and storage areas are useful extras Points to look for Good support for the baby's head, neck and back. Can you adjust the support to suit your baby's size? Well padded leg holes For you, wide, well padded shoulder straps and back straps. This will distribute the weight, and the straps are less likely to dig in Is it easy to put on, adjust and put the baby into? Can you do this without help from someone else? Is it machine washable? This is a bonus, otherwise it should be wipe clean. It may also come with a detachable soft piece of cloth where your baby rests his head to help keep you clean Some front carriers adjust for the baby to face the parent in the early weeks and then, while still worn on your front, turn to face the world. Babies enjoy being able to watch where they are going

while having you close Some carriers allow you to carry the baby in a cradle position, on the hip, or even adjust to become back carriers.

Bath & Toiletries

Points to consider choosing bath or toiletries for your baby.

Baby baths These are small, portable plastic baths designed to contain your baby in a manageable space, with gentle contouring for comfort. They may come with handles, drainage plugs and integral soap dishes. They are suitable from newborn, and can be used until your baby outgrows them. There are two types: Those that sit in the base of the adult bath: these are easily filled from the bath taps and emptied by a drainage plug or by tipping; some have handles that you can use for hanging the bath out of the way when it's not needed. Those that sit on the rim of the adult bath (check the dimensions of your bath before buying); they're usually filled by a shower attachment or jug and emptied by a drainage plug. The big advantage of these is that they raise the baby up to the level of the bath rim, giving you much easier access and saving your aching back. For babies who are likely to travel, look out for a portable, inflatable soft baby bath which packs down very small and comes with its own travel bag. Points to consider Some parents don't bother with a bath, and find alternative ways to wash their baby. At first, you could bath your baby in the kitchen sink, or use a clean washing up bowl. Some parents like to take their new baby in the adult bath with them. Other parents simply put a little water in the adult bath and lean over the edge while they bath their baby. As an alternative to a baby bath, you can also buy baby seats which fit into an adult bath and give your baby some support

Baby Bath Seats These sit in the adult bath and are designed to contain your baby in one comfortable position, leaving your hands free to wash him. Even though a baby is supported by the seat and his head is kept clear of the water, many parents still feel the need to keep one hand close at all times, particularly with a very young baby. There are three types: Towelling cloth stretched hammock-style over a metal frame. These are suitable from newborn. They are quite cheap, the cloth comes off for machine washing, they are small and easy to store but offer the least support to the baby and are quickly outgrown A moulded lie-back seat with suckers to secure it to the bottom of the bath, suitable from newborn, ensuring the baby is well supported A rigid plastic seat that encircles a sitting-up baby (from about six months) to keep her in one place. It has suction pads to secure it to the bottom of the bath and may have an integral play feature Points to consider A bath seat is much less bulky and easier to store than a baby bath and often makes new parents feel more confident about bathing their baby A lie-back bath seat will be outgrown once your baby can sit up Since the seat is used in an adult bath, you use more water than you would in a baby bath

Bath mats When your baby is in the adult bath, you must have a mat to prevent him slipping or falling. The mat should fit snugly into the bottom of the bath and have good suction pads. Look out for the heat-sensitive variety which changes colour if the water is too hot.

Top and tail bowls These are small bowls with two or three compartments, two for water and one for soap. The idea is that you can have a small amount of clean water and a sponge on hand for your baby's face and a different one for your baby's bottom. These bowls are also useful for nappy changing. Bath thermometers You can check the water temperature with your elbow or wrist (you soon get to know what's comfortable for your baby), but using a water thermometer as well is reassuring. The ideal temperature is 36-38 C. There are various makes available, from simple thermometers to fun designs that double up as bath toys.

Towels Your baby shouldn't share the family towels for hygiene reasons. Choose good quality baby-sized towels that will wash well and remain soft. You can also buy towelling wraps which have a corner turned over, making a hood to slip over your baby's head for instant warmth while you cuddle her dry.

Flannels & sponges The sponge or flannel you use for your baby's face should be different from the one you use for washing the rest of her. You can buy various baby-sized sponges, including natural sponges as well as man-made ones. Some are labelled hypo-allergenic. Whatever you buy needs to be very soft.

Creams, oils and lotions These are designed to restore moisture to your baby's skin, although you may feel this is not necessary on a daily basis. Most babies do enjoy gentle massage, and you can use a dab of cream, oil or lotion to smooth over your baby's skin. **Baby powder** Traditionally used after a bath to help dry a baby's skin. Don't use too much, particularly if you're using a nappy cream, as it can cause the creases around arms and legs to become clogged. It could be dangerous if inhaled by your baby. Baby powder is finer and less perfumed than adult talcum powder. **Nappy creams** Some nappy creams are barrier creams designed to repel moisture from your baby's bottom. Others contain medication to treat nappy rash. Do consult your GP or health visitor if your baby is suffering from persistent nappy rash. **Potties and toilet aids** The process of getting out of nappies to using the family loo can take time, and there are a few products that can help you along the way. But choosing the right time to train is the key to success.

Potties A potty should be comfortable, with support for the lower back and tops of the thighs and with a splash guard at the front, making it suitable for boys and girls. An integral handle is useful for emptying, and some potties come with a lid. There are lots of potties to choose from with different designs - some even play a tune when your child performs! The aim is to make learning to use a potty fun and you may have to put aside any ideas about good taste when it comes to choosing a potty your toddler wants to use. Potties are relatively inexpensive and it's a good idea to have several round the house, upstairs and downstairs, so that you can always reach one in a hurry. You can also buy travel potties which come with potty liners and fold up into a travel bag when not in use.

Toilet steps and seats Most toilets are too big for toddlers to sit on comfortably, and may appear threatening, so you can buy a toilet training seat which reduces the size of the hole and makes it more comfortable. There are several different designs to choose from, and most are standard to fit all toilets. It should be quick and easy to put on when your child needs it, and easy to keep clean. Another useful gadget to have by the family loo is a step-up stool to take your toddler up to toilet seat height and to help him reach the basin to wash his hands afterwards. Look for one with a slip-resistant surface and base.

Nappies There are two kinds of nappies: disposable and reusable. A disposable nappy is basically a shaped pad filled with absorbent gel and/or pulp, covered in a soft liner and enclosed in a waterproof bottom-shaped casing - it is thrown away once soiled. A reusable nappy is made of cloth which is either pre-shaped or folded, fitted with a throwaway liner and encased in a reusable pair of waterproof baby pants. The liner is thrown away but the cloth interior and pants can be machine washed and reused over and over again. The pros and cons: disposable nappies Pros: · Small, lightweight and very compact - easy to store and carry out and about. · No large initial, up-front expense - you spread your costs over time. · Convenient - no laundering required. ·

High tech - nappy manufacturers are constantly developing their designs and the materials they use in a bid to provide maximum absorbency, to keep baby dry longer and prevent leakage. Cons: · You spread your cost but overall your expenses may be higher. · High-tech solutions may involve the use of man-made products which may not agree with your baby's skin. They may also generate other broader health concerns. · High tech solutions are often not bio-degradable and can have an impact on the environment. The pros and cons: cloth nappies Pros: · Nappies can be reused over and over again and can be passed down to siblings. · Some research suggests babies using cloth nappies may potty train earlier because they are more aware of when they are wet. · Cloth nappies are generally made of pure cotton - a natural material, often unbleached. · May work out cheaper over the long term. · Many are now pre-shaped and fastened with poppers or velcro. Cons: · A large lump sum outlay is required to buy your first set of nappies. · Some added costs - using the washing machine, tumble dryer, liners, nappy soaker etc. · Labour intensive - you have to launder the nappies (or pay someone to launder for you through a nappy service). · May need to change more frequently. · Bulkier on the baby, bulkier to store and carry about. · Wet nappies have to be carried home - can't just throw them away wherever you are.

Baby Toiletries There are a number of different products available in chemists and supermarkets; you may prefer to try several until you find the ones that suit your baby. Babies have sensitive skin that is prone to dryness and easily irritated. Choose baby skincare toiletries rather than adult versions because they are gentler on the skin. If your baby suffers from skin allergies or eczema, check with your GP or health visitor for advice on what to use. There are products which are specially designed to help. Many brands make a complete range of products, including shampoos, talc and nappy creams, so if you like a make you can stick to it. Look out for a new bath product with ingredients that help relieve congestion when your baby has a stuffy nose. Bath bubbles or lotion. Your baby isn't dirty in the same way as an older child, but adding mild bubbles or lotion to the water will be cleansing and make it an enjoyable experience. It's less drying than soap, too.

Shampoo Always choose the ultra mild 'tear free' variety. If, however, your baby has a downy covering rather than luxuriant locks, you can sluice the diluted baby bath mixture over his head and then rinse with clean water, instead of bothering with shampoo. Cotton wool & cotton buds. These are useful for careful washing and gentle cleaning, particularly around the delicate ears, eyes and nose and nappy area. Baby cotton wool should be ultra soft and made of pure cotton. It comes in pleats, balls, pads or on a roll.

Scissors & clippers Baby scissors are small, have rounded ends and blades that cut without being sharp. Some people prefer to use special clippers to deal with tiny nails.

Brushes & combs Few babies have enough hair to warrant regular brushing or combing in the early months. Once they do however, it's worth having a set exclusively for your baby's use. Choose a brush that is small, extremely soft and gentle, and a comb that has blunt, rounded edges. Bath toys. To begin with, your baby will take little or no notice of bath toys, but once a baby is sitting up in the bath, toys come into their own. There are plenty to choose from; some make noises, bob about or squirt out water. Simple things can give just as much pleasure, however: a small plastic jug or cup for pouring water can keep a baby amused in the bath.

Buying tips for choosing a changing bag Essential kit for mums and dads - a changing bag is specially designed to carry all that you need to change a nappy, and

more besides, when you're out and about. At one time changing bags looked like changing bags - usually made from a nursery-themed fabric with a changing mat attached to the outside. Then the manufacturers realised that for several years a changing bag would be a mother's most used accessory, even replacing her handbag, and she might prefer something a little more stylish. There are now lots of styles to choose from that anyone, mum or dad, would be pleased to carry. Changing bags are now designed to be fashionable - some even come in real or lookalike leather and suede - as well as practical and convenient to use. Your changing bag is going to be in daily use so it's worth thinking about what you need before you buy. There are several styles - backpack, shoulder or weekend baby bag. · A backpack-style changing bag leaves you with both hands free · Look for lots of compartments to store nappies, sacks, wipes and cream, a change of clothes and a favourite toy. Some bags may also have a small zip-up waterproof bag for dirty clothes or messy items, a little pouch bag for storing a baby's soother, and extra compartments so you can store your own things to save carrying a handbag as well · A wipe-clean interior to the bag and all of its compartments is essential - a machine washable bag is even better. Some now have a waterproof nylon lining which is more durable than traditional PVC · Some bags have a separate compartment or inner bag for carrying feeding things; this might be thermally insulated to keep the contents at a constant temperature · Changing bags should come with a folding mat for the baby to lie on for nappy changes. Some are made of machine washable cloth while others are wipe-clean plastic and may be padded · Adjustable straps are an important consideration. Wide straps with extra padding are the most comfortable · Some pram and pushchair manufacturers make changing bags in matching fabrics to co-ordinate with their products Baby changing accessories There is a wide range of products available to make nappy changing time easier: Some are sold to match a range of nursery furniture. Changing mat You can change your baby's nappy on a clean towel, but the more practical solution is to buy a special changing mat which is wipe-clean and foam filled to make an easy, hygienic, padded and comfortable surface, with a raised edge to stop your baby from rolling off. Changing box This is a neat 'tool box' with compartments for storing all the essential cleaning and changing bits and pieces, a lid and carry handle.

Nappy stacker Designed to keep nappies readily to hand, a nappy stacker is a shaped fabric bag that you fill with nappies then hang up out of the way but within easy reach of your changing area.

Changing stations A changing station raises your baby up to your waist height for the numerous changes of nappy (up to 12 times a day for a new baby), so that you don't have to kneel on the floor or bend over the bed, which can cause backache. It is also designed to store all the things you need to hand. The big safety consideration is that your baby must never be left on any raised surface alone, not even for a second as you turn to pick something up. Keep one hand on your baby at all times when changing; even very young babies can shift their weight enough to topple. This sort of raised nappy changing area is really only suitable if you're extremely vigilant and as your baby gets bigger, you may find that it's safer to change him on the floor. However, a changing station does continue to provide a useful place to keep everything tidily together. Some can even be converted later on into a piece of furniture for your child's bedroom. Here are some of the different features you might find: · An integral harness · A fixed, wipe-clean, PVC covered changing area on top, with moulded accessory trays alongside for storing nappy changing and washing things · Storage trays or shelves for towels, clothing and other baby things · Castor wheels so you can move the table around. The wheels are usually lockable for safety · A changing table with a foldaway frame to save space · A lift-up top with a baby bath underneath, with a plug and drainage pipe. Depending on the layout of your house

you may have to fill the bath with a jug and drain the water into a bucket if there's no basin nearby, which means that using a changing station for bathing may not be as convenient as having a traditional baby bath to use in the family bathroom. Changing stations can also convert into free-standing shelving units or small chests of drawers. These are usually made from wood to look like a piece of furniture, and while they will have a top level with raised edge for nappy changing, the PVC changing mat is a separate. **Buying tips** Think about the space available in your home and how you plan to use a changing station, both now and in the future, before buying one: · Which is the most convenient and warm room for changing your baby? You may not want to go upstairs to a bathroom six or more times a day but you may not want a changing station cluttering up your living room · Do you want to move the changing station around? In this case you will need castors · Do you want a piece of furniture that will give long-term use? · What is your budget? Tables which convert into furniture are generally more expensive · What is the height of the nappy changing area? This differs from make to make and, as the main purpose is to save your back, choose one that brings the baby to the best height for whoever will be using it most

Toys & Games

Tips for buying toys and games..

Things for babies to look at A baby's biggest toy is a face. Research has shown that the object that babies are most interested in is the human face. By smiling and talking they start on the road to communicating with people. Apart from faces, babies have a preference for other types of objects. Always give the baby plenty of time to look at them. Babies like things that have bold, clear features like a photograph of a face or a picture drawn on a paper plate. They like things that are patterned such as bold fabrics. They like things that have rough textures like carpets or mats. They like toys that are brightly coloured. They like things that are shiny like silver foil or stainless steel. Once a baby's neck is stronger, you can hang objects above their pram or changing mat. The Early Learning Centre gym with the detachable teddy on a swing seems to be a real favourite. You could always invest in a cot mobile. These are expensive but if it breaks, Mothercare used to do replacement bits for it sold separately. They also enjoy things that move like a balloon dangling in the breeze. They also enjoy the game of peek-a-boo which can go on for hours, and pop up toys.

Things for babies to listen to At first babies can hear high-pitched sounds better than low pitched sounds. By six weeks babies can recognise the sound of their own mother's voice and they enjoy baby talk because of the rhyme and repetition. Although babies can be frightened by sudden loud noises a continuous hum such as the washing machine may soothe them. You could make a rattle out of anything, and several rattles could produce different noises. Try filling containers with the following; Rice, pasta, beans, lentils, salt, water, earth, and, pebbles, flowers seeds, clothes pegs, bottle tops, paper clips, buttons beads or marbles.

Things for babies to feel and hold Babies learn about the world through sense of touch from birth. They may not seem to be doing much with objects but they are learning about how they feel and how they behave. They may enjoy; Swiping - a balloon on a string Massage very gently without clothes in a warm room Different things to lie on Cloths and comforters They may also enjoy kicking with their feet so you could try hanging things on elastic or letting them kick in a bouncy chair Ideas for things for a baby to hold Living room Books, old magazines & catalogues, cotton reels, ribbon, playing cards, drinks mats, cushions Bathroom Toothbrush, comb, hairbrush, clean towel Kitchen Saucepans, spoons, tins and unopened packets, egg cups, plastic containers, saucepan lids, ice cube tray, egg boxes, whisk, funnel, straws,

tea towel, table mats, kitchen utensils Miscellaneous Plastic bottles, rattles homemade and bought, empty boxes that are clean, paper except newspaper, unbreakable baby mirrors, half blown up ball, wicker baskets and bowls, bunch of keys

Safety & hygiene Babies put everything in their mouths so never let a baby have anything small enough to choke on - this includes large objects which have small bits that could get detached. The safest containers are one's with screw tops. Avoid bottles that had anything dangerous in them. Avoid anything that could suffocate the baby including plastic bags, cushions and pillows if there is any chance that they will fall on top of them. Beware of anything that could get wound their fingers, toes or necks. Avoid pointed objects that could press in their skin, go down their throat or they could cut themselves on. Avoid heavy objects. Make sure all playthings are clean. Objects that have been in contact with food are the main danger and it is safest to sterilise cooking utensils for a baby under 9 months. Wash other things regularly in washing up liquid, rinse and drip dry.

Toys for small toddlers A large push along trolley is always popular - especially ones filled with blocks. Make sure that it will take their weight when they pull themselves up on it. They might enjoy carrying things about so you could give them a bag to put things in. Play chasing games which encourage running. Toddlers find it hard to walk alongside an adult or hold their hand. They find it much easier to gravitate a central point like a buggy while you watch them. Pull along toys become popular and are good for improving balance and co-ordination. The best toys make a noise and have a low, wide base which stops them falling over. You could also thread cotton reels together on a string or provide a cardboard box with a string attached. You could also invest in balls and make bean bags to practice throwing games. Dolls, soft toys and puppets take on great emotional value and help stimulate the imagination. They need to be soft and cuddly and the right size to fit in the child's arms comfortably. They will also want to help around the house and it might be worth investing in a little Hoover and sweeping set that will probably keep them occupied for hours. More toys for small toddlers Toddlers love containers like saucepans that have lids that you can take off and put back on. Egg poachers are particularly good. Shape sorters and posting boxes are popular. You can make these out of a cardboard box or buy a new one.

Nesting toys are good like kitchen bowls and paper cups. Small jigsaw puzzles with animal shapes to fit in the holes are good for developing motor skills. The pieces do get lost so consider buying at boot fairs. Anything that involves turning and screwing is good - you may need to go to a toy store to find nuts and bolts big enough to play with. Also beakers and rings and balls that fit on a central spindle work well. Threading toys are fun and Early Learning centre sell cotton reels and string.

Toys - Blocks These promote physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. When children build with blocks they use their imaginations, exercise muscles and sharpen co-ordination. They explore scientific and mathematical ideas and learn concepts such as gravity, weight, volume, classification, appearance, similarities, differences, measurements, shapes and fractions. They can experiment, hypothesize and problem solve - all in the context of play. They experience cause and effect and learn the value of planning ahead. They also learn about risk taking. They can be used in loads of ways - from building a castle to a farm and are used differently by different ages. Blocks extend the play of other toys like cars and animals. The possibilities are endless. When children share blocks they learn negotiating skills and the value of co-operative work. A great toy!

Age and Ability Recommendations Toys that aren't safe for under-threes carry a safety symbol warning, as described above. Three is the magic age, because it is assumed that by this time children will have learnt about the dangers of putting things in their mouths. Toys that have this symbol may contain small bits that could be choked on. Most toys carry a suggested age recommendation. Age recommendations are discretionary and only there for guidance. It's up to you to decide if your baby or child can cope with it. However, don't be tempted to buy something aimed at a slightly older age, thinking your child is bright or will 'grow into' the toy. This is usually a mistake; the toy is either frustrating or boring for the child and by the time he is old enough to play with it, the novelty value has worn off or half the components have been lost

What our parents say.. James's mum Sharon says that although James is a boy he loves pushing around his little blue, yellow and red plastic trolley everywhere. It was cheap to buy and it has given him hundreds of hours of fun and he has now upgraded himself to pushing his buggy and big supermarket trolleys. His plastic trolley has let him out in the garden and out with all the family in the neighbourhood and he can see other things of interest such as cars (learning their colours), looking for dogs & cats etc. Plus he can carry things in his trolley basket, such as other toys or things for Sharon. Susan says that Amy loved shop things like a till and trolley and things to buy & sell. Also a picnic set for teddy bears picnic and anything that they can use their imagination with. Amy's mum Sharon says that although they had lots of toys in the summer holidays a ball never settles for long! What our parents say.. From age 1 to age Juliet loved her push along dog on wheels and her pretend Hoover. Natalie's mum said that she loved Dominoes, Puppy Racers, Pop up Pirates and Buckaroo - all around age three. Ruth - Ella's mum says that she lived her Chicco piano & xylophone all in one from 0 to 2. From three she loved her Chicco dressing table and accessories and from four her colouring pens, especially the self-sharpening crayons in loads of colours. Ruth says that you take the top one out and replace the one below with a different colour. From two, Ella loved dressing up clothes, and from 1-4 a plastic kitten and accessories. She also loved the Barbie CD & Radio (£25) and the Barbie telephones and Jeep.

Good toys will entertain, stimulate and educate. Entertainment is the most important element, because your child won't want to play with a toy in the first place unless it's fun and rewarding for him. At this age, 'education' means developing new physical skills like holding, pushing and pulling; learning about what happens in real life by imitating Mum or Dad, or recognising different shapes and colours. For the first couple of months the most interesting thing in your baby's life is you. Your baby can only see things clearly around 25cm (10 inches) away from him until this time, so the vast majority of play activities will be beyond him. A smiling, loving parent with sparkling eyes will be much more fascinating than a jingly teddy bear. While it's true that developing babies and toddlers need lots of things to touch, discover and play with, you don't have to buy out the local toy shop. Carefully selected objects from around the house can provide plenty of fun - there's nothing like banging a saucepan with a wooden spoon when you're sitting on the kitchen floor to learn all about cause and effect. Having friends round to play or going to their house is all part of enhancing your baby's social skills, even though babies and toddlers tend to play independently but alongside other children for some time. It also gives you a chance to try out some different toys to discover the kinds of thing that might appeal to your baby. Don't be disappointed if a new or expensive toy isn't played with endlessly. Every toy has its moment; some will be discarded quite quickly, others will become firm favourites, to be got out again and again. Kitty loved lots of fake jewellery and scarves from charity shops and Tom really loved his Bob the Builder computer. I

would say buy lots of books and stick them everywhere. Mandy says to contact the manufacturer if a piece of a toy breaks or gets lost - they can be surprisingly helpful. Bryn's mum recommends the Reading Fun Computer (various activities i.e. matching rhymes, matching letters, counting etc. There are pictures of objects to choose from on the screen which help in choosing the right key. She also recommends Buckaroo, Pop up Pirates and Hungry Hippo's. Jessica's mum recommends farm animals from 2-6 years, Duplo Lego from 2-6 years, Popoids from 2-4 years and cars from 2-6 years.

Which toys to buy For the early months, toys with textures, noise and movement will help your baby develop: Colour and shape recognition Hand-eye co-ordination Awareness of cause and effect Look for: Cot mobiles rotate and play a tune; some are coloured black and white because it's believed that very young babies see mono better than colours Light-shows projecting colours, moving shapes and play a tune too Cot activity centres that strap onto the cot side and provide amusement, particularly good for a baby who is sitting up Soft, bright activity toys have play value too. When you buy a cuddly toy, look for extra features like different textures and/or sounds. Cuddly furry toys are often bought as gifts for young babies but they are actually much more interesting five or six year old's who appreciate the 'cuteness'. Be aware babies can choke on the fluff from soft toys, so stick to those designed specifically for this age group Rattles, squeakers and teething toys - babies enjoy shaking and chewing Toys that attach onto the pram, the pushchair, the car seat or the highchair, with straps, buckles and suction pads to keep them in place For the later months, toys that a baby can control will continue to develop the skills he's already learnt. They will also help: Balance and mobility To develop the imagination

Later toys look for: Shape sorters - posting the right piece into its slot is challenging and very satisfying Pull and push along toys and rolling balls - great for getting a baby crawling and walking Musical toys - fun, good for making a lot of noise, learning about pitch and rhythm and developing a sense of achievement Stacking toys and building bricks - creating towers is impressive, knocking them down is even better Sit on and ride toys - give a sense of freedom and independence as well as good exercise Bath toys - may encourage reluctant bathers into the bath and make wash time play time. Can often double up for use in the sandpit or paddling pool outside Role play toys - such as a toy phone with buttons to press and noises to listen to while you mimic mum and dad While many baby toys are still made along traditional lines, there's an increasing number that are electronically based, using batteries as a power source. While some don't add a great deal of play value to the toy, others are excellent, even though it means you'll need a never ending supply of batteries. Before you buy an electronic toy, check how loud and penetrating any noises are and, if the toy speaks, the quality and accent of the voice. Lots of parents complain about the repetitive voices and noises, even if their babies seem to love them. All battery-powered toys for this age group should have toddler-proof battery compartments, however, you still need to be vigilant if an older child can take the batteries out.

Storage To save your sanity, get organised so that you can quickly and easily put away all the toys at the end of the day - be like Mary Poppins and make tidying up a game! - and invest in some good storage solutions. What to look for: Think about the storage of big toys before you buy: you may well get them home and realise that it's the equivalent of finding space for another armchair or coffee table. If space is at a premium, look for designs which fold down If you are buying a toy made up of lots of small parts (for example building bricks) it's worth spending a little extra for one that comes in its own durable storage container If you want the toy box to double up as an attractive piece of furniture in the living room then you can buy a variety of wooden

chests, some painted, others varnished or decorated with transfers Choose a chest which has a device to support the lid and prevent it from slamming down on tiny fingers A cheaper alternative is a set of sturdy plastic stacking boxes. These are colourful, inexpensive and ideal for the job You can also buy fabric toy bags with pictures or your child's name appliquéd on them, and net bags which will hang from the back of the door or from the taps in the bathroom

Toy Safety If you buy a new toy from a reputable store or toy shop, you should be getting a toy that has been scrupulously regulated for safety. Look for these safety marks for reassurance: A smiling lion's head in a triangle is the British Toy & Hobby Association's members' mark, to show that this toy conforms to a strict code of practice The same lion mark above the British Association of Toy Retailers' logo, displayed by shops, shows that all the products sold there meet the toy safety standard, but may not all carry the lion mark on their packaging A red circle with a line through it, a frowning baby's face and the numbers 0-3 indicates that the toy is not safe for children under three years; it is not an ability guide but a safety warning A CE mark is there to assist the free movement of goods throughout the European Community and means the toy should carry the manufacturer's name and address. It is not a safety mark Avoid buying from street markets, where imported toys may be sold that aren't up to UK safety standards If you buy second-hand or are given hand-me-down toys, check very carefully for any signs of damage or deterioration before giving them to your baby; if possible give them a good wash or wipe down with disinfectant.

Car Seats & Safety

General information about car safety.

CAR SEATS - www.childcarseats.org.uk Carrying Children Safely In a crash at just 30 mph, an unrestrained child would be thrown forward with a force 30 to 60 times their body weight. They would be thrown about inside the vehicle, injuring themselves and quite possibly seriously injuring (or even killing) other people inside the vehicle. They are also likely to be ejected from the car through one of the windows. It is not safe to hold a child on your lap. In a crash, the child could be crushed between your body and part of the car's interior. Even if you are using a seat belt, the child would be torn from your arms you would not be able to hold onto them, no matter how hard you try. It is also dangerous to put a seat belt around yourself and a child (or around two children). The safest way for children to travel in cars is in a child seat that is suitable for their weight and size. A properly fitted child restraint keeps the child in their seat, preventing them from being thrown about inside, or ejected from, the vehicle. It also absorbs some of the impact force. This means that your child is much less likely to be killed or injured in a crash. To be effective, child restraints must be fitted and used correctly. Surveys have consistently shown that a high proportion of child restraints are incorrectly fitted, usually for one or more of these reasons: · Seat belt too loose · Seat belt not routed through child seat correctly · Buckle crunch (buckle resting against part of the child seat's frame, which means that in a crash it might break or snap open) · Handle on baby seat not positioned properly · Child seat not compatible with car · Child seat old and in bad condition · Child too large or too small for the seat they are using. **Booster Seats** By the time children weigh 15 25 kgs (33 55 lbs) (usually about 4 to 6 years old, but the weight is the most important factor) they are ready to use booster seats. This means that the adult seat belt will go around them and the seat. So it is important that the seat belt is correctly adjusted. The basic points to note are: · the belt should be worn as tight as possible · the lap belt should go over the pelvic region (from hipbone to hipbone), not the stomach · the diagonal strap should rest over the shoulder, not the neck. **Seat Belts**

Seat belts are designed for people 150 cms (about 5ft) and taller. Don't let your child graduate to using the seat belt on its own too soon. Children are usually big enough to use the seat belt on its own by the time they are about 11 years old, although this varies from child to child. Threepoint seat belts (lap and diagonal) provide greater protection than lap belts. However, lap belts are far better than no belt at all. The lap belt should be placed over the pelvis (from hipbone to hipbone), not the stomach and worn as tight as possible. Passenger Restraints Some passengers with disabilities may need postural support during the journey, and a variety of passenger restraints to assist people to remain upright in their seat are available. Under no circumstances should they be used instead of a suitable seat belt as they do not conform to a recognised standard nor are they designed for this purpose.

First Stage Car Seats Newborn baby to 10kg or 13kg (depending on make) What to look for A first stage car seat, or infant carrier, is used to secure your baby safely in the car in a rear-facing position. Out of the car it should be light enough to carry your baby in and double up as low, supportive, rocking chair at home. Give yourself plenty of time to choose the right car seat for you, but remember that you will need to buy it in time to take your newborn home from hospital. All first car seats should conform to European Standard R44.03 They are sold according to the weight of the baby and are suitable up to a weight of either 10kg (usually around 6 to 9 months) or 13kg (around 12 to 15 months). Experts now believe that babies are safest in rear-facing seats for as long possible. However, your baby may become too tall for an infant carrier before he reaches the recommended weight limit, and some parents find that they cannot comfortably carry a baby of 13kg in a car seat. Some car seats are part of a travel system which means they will fit onto a specific chassis to form a pushchair Carrycot with fixing kit

Car seats - What to look for Harness strap cover - extra padding around the harness strap may be a standard fitting with your car seat, if not a cover can be bought individually Sun screen - fits to the car window to stop the sun shining on your baby; there are several different designs available Baby view mirror - a small mirror to position alongside the car rear view mirror, to enable you to look at your baby or child without having to turn round Heat cover - goes over the car seat when not in use, to stop metal frames and buckles from getting hot when the car is parked in the sun Seat protector - a plastic cover that goes over the back seat to protect it from scuff marks, spills and dirty feet

Play tray - some types of car seat can be fitted with a removable play tray. Check that it would be quick and simple to remove in the event of an accident

Car tray - a small folding tray that attaches to the back of the adult seat, opening out when the car is stationary to hold a bottle, drinking carton, tissues and rubbish bag Toy tidy - a specially designed bag with lots of compartments to hold toys and baby paraphernalia; usually attaches to the back of the adult seat Toys - there is a good selection of toys designed to be played with in the car that attach in various ways depending on the type of car seat and age of baby or child Padding - all baby and child car seats should be well padded for both comfort and added protection. The shell should be sturdy (though it may be lightweight) and contoured

Strap covers - some car seats have padded sleeves around the harness straps and a padded cushion under the buckle for extra comfort; if not already fitted, these are available as individual items from accessory companies

Seat covers - many car seat covers are removable for machine washing; most manufacturers also supply spares
Choice of positions - forward facing seats (from 9kg up) may have the option to recline, which is a bonus if you want your baby to sleep on longer trips
Instructions - some car seat instructions are excellent, but most are complex; have a look at the instructions in the shop before buying and ask the retailer to explain anything that isn't clear

Installation - most seats need an adult lap and diagonal belt to secure them, although some forward facing seats can be secured with just the lap belt in the middle of the back seat, which is the safest place and useful if you have two or more older children. Some manufacturers sell fixing kits for child seats which cannot be fitted using a car's existing belts - the big advantage of these is that you can fix the seat in the middle of the back seat. If you need to buy a fixing kit, choose one made by the manufacturer of your car seat, if available

Buying second-hand Second-hand car seats are generally considered a risk to a baby or child's safety because even if a seat looks intact, there may be internal wear and tear or even serious damage which would stop the seat giving full protection to a child in an accident. Older car seats may also have been made before the latest safety standards came into force and may not have all the improved safety design features. If you do opt for a second-hand seat check that:
· It hasn't been in any sort of accident.
· Don't buy it unless you are sure who's owned it and its full history
· It doesn't show any signs of wear and tear
· It has a full set of manufacturer's instructions

Useful accessories · Sun and rain covers - some infant carriers have them as extras, particularly if they can be used as part of a travel system. They are also available as individual items from manufacturers who specialise in nursery accessories
· Aprons and cosytoes - also available as extras with some makes of infant carrier, particularly if they are part of a travel system, or as individual items ·

Cat and insect nets - fine netting material which fits over an infant carrier to protect the baby out of doors
· Head cushion and neck support - many infant carriers are sold with them; if not they are worth buying as they not only add comfort but also support the baby's head. You can also buy head cushions and neck supports for older babies and children who tend to fall asleep in the car

Safety If there is one single item that is essential for all babies, it is a car seat. Even if you don't own a car, you will need a seat for when you are travelling in other people's cars. You will need it from day one - in fact, some hospitals won't allow you to leave the premises until you have got a car seat to transport your most precious cargo safely home. Having bought it - use it. This may sound obvious, patronising even, but the horrifying fact is that although people buy car seats for their babies and children, some still don't bother to use them on every car journey. Some parents think they can get round buying a car seat by using a carrycot or Moses basket secured with a seat belt on the back seat. You should NEVER put a baby in a Moses basket on the back seat and you shouldn't put a carrycot on the back seat unless it is specially designed for use in the car. You can now buy carrycots with internal harnesses and dedicated fixing kits which are safe to use in the car; they are usually part of a travel system. However, if you do, remember that you will still need to invest in a car seat as soon as your baby is able to sit up. Before you choose there are three main points to remember: Buy a car seat to suit your baby's weight, not age. As soon as your baby's weight exceeds the limit, move on to the next stage Not all car seats fit all cars; check that the model you have chosen will fit your car. Get professional advice if you are at

all unsure Buy a car seat because it has safety features that improve fit and protection, not because it has attractive fabric choices or good value accessories.

General

All the extra stuff that you will; end up buying too!.

Highchairs & lowchairs Through baby to toddlerhood you may find you need more than one type of chair for feeding and play as your baby grows. Before sitting up they may enjoy a bouncing or rocking chair, which could double up for first feeds. Once your baby is sitting up they will enjoy sharing family mealtimes in a highchair. From around two years, a booster seat or a raised chair will fit at the table. You will also need something to use when you are visiting friends or on holiday - this is where a clip-on seat or a fabric travel seat can be useful What to look for How comfy is it? Learning about eating can be stressful at times, the least you can do is make it a comfortable experience Will it cater for changing needs as they grow? Some designs convert to table and chair and can be used beyond this for playing and eating snacks How much room will it take up? If space is at a premium, think about overall size as well as folding and putting it away. Does it have a harness? Babies and toddlers must wear a harness or restraint in the highchair at all times. The best harness is a 5-point which goes over the shoulders, round the middle and between the legs. Many highchairs have these as a fixed feature; if not, check there are D-shaped rings at the seat base for attaching your own. Is the tray a good size with high edges to prevent food from falling on to the floor? How easy is it to keep clean? Awkward crevices will soon become sticky and unhygienic. A removable tray makes cleaning much easier Is the seat cushioning replaceable? Many highchairs are PVC covered which is soft and warm to sit on, but also prone to wear and tear and doesn't take kindly to disinfectant. Some highchair manufacturers offer replacement seat cushioning Three-in-one highchairs These highchairs are also known as cube highchairs. They convert from a highchair into a toddler's small chair and table which is ideal for playing or even eating snacks. However, they are quite bulky as a highchair and can't be folded or put away. They aren't adjustable in any way and the eating tray is fixed with screws (you remove it when it's ready to convert to table/chair). The seat is very upright, which can be a disadvantage for younger babies. Booster seats and grow-talls When your child gets too big or grown up to use a highchair, a booster seat comes into its own. These are moulded plastic seats which strap onto an ordinary chair, raising the child up to the table. Portable, fold-up varieties are useful if you go out a lot. Boosters don't usually have the facility to attach a harness, however, so they are only suitable for children old enough to sit safely on their own. Another useful gadget to look out for is a 'grow-tall' - a heavy duty, sprung plastic device which fits onto the legs of kitchen or dining chairs, and raises the height of the chair so that your child can reach the table.

Highchair accessories · Harness - essential if your highchair is not fitted with one. Buy a 5-point which goes over the shoulders as well as round the middle · Insert - usually sold separately, this is a padded cushion which fits in the seat. Useful if your highchair has little or no padding, or if your baby is very small and needs the additional support ·

Floor mat - easy to clean mat to go under the highchair and help catch the bits · Toys - you can also buy toys specially designed to fix onto a tray Multi-height adjustable highchairs These are very practical highchairs. They are normally padded PVC seats on a metal frame. The seat can be raised up and down to suit your needs, including going right down to a baby low-seat for sitting in to play. Most have a reclining seat back which can be more comfortable for a very young baby. The tray is adjustable

and removable so that it can be moved up close to the baby or taken out for cleaning. Some also have an adjustable footrest. These chairs fold up when not in use, and are normally freestanding, although they may not be as compact as some which are specifically sold for their folding ability. Some are fitted with castors and can be moved easily from room to room. One design converts to a low baby swing.

Folding highchairs These are ideal if you are tight on space. They fold up into something compact enough to fit into the broom cupboard when not in use, or even in the boot of the car. The drawbacks are that they do not always have footrests and the tray may be in a fixed position. On some the tray flips down over the baby's head once he's in the highchair, which can be awkward for bigger babies. Fixed wooden highchairs These are classic, country kitchen style highchairs. The tray can normally be permanently removed (if attached by screws), converting the chair into a raised toddler seat for use at the family table (but before you buy check the height is correct for your table). These highchairs aren't adjustable in any way and don't fold. They have fixed trays (sometimes wood, sometimes plastic) which can make thorough cleaning more difficult. They usually need a soft cushion insert for your baby to sit on, probably sold separately

Safety gates What is a safety gate? Safety gates protect your child once he or she becomes mobile. Gates can be positioned at the top and/or bottom of staircases and across door openings to limit your child's exploration to a known safe area. In some cases extending gates can be used between walls and across rooms to act as internal room dividers. Some can also be used as window bars. Do I need one? While your baby is tiny and basically immobile you will have no need for a gate but once he/she begins to crawl or walk they can become essential depending on the layout of your home. The most critical use for a safety gate is across the top of the stairs to help ensure your child does not inadvertently tumble downstairs. As your child becomes more adventurous you may also want to consider a gate at the foot of the stairs to prevent him climbing up unsupervised. Gates can also help you convert a room of your house into a baby-safe giant playpen and help you keep your child away from hazardous areas of your home. Gates are recommended as suitable for containing children up to the age of 24 months - but remember children develop at different rates and some will fathom the locking mechanism more quickly than others. What to look for There are broadly three types of safety gates: Walk-through gates with an integral door. Swing open gates with a hinge that attaches to the wall. Barrier-style gates that can be easily removed for access. Gates are made from metal, wood, plastic or fabric and there are pros and cons for each type. Coated metal may chip over time, wood may mark, plastic gates are often less attractive but wipe clean well. Gates attach to the wall either with securing wall cups or pressure locks and some require drilling into the wall or banister. Consider assembly and installing carefully to ensure your chosen gate can be correctly fitted to the space you have in mind. Locks and handles may be positioned across the top cross bar of the gate or down the side. Locks should be easy for an adult to open and secure but effectively child-proof. Those with a floor level cross bar can cause a tripping hazard, but simple-to-fit step plates are available to help alleviate this problem. Whatever your choice, it should conform to British Standard 4125.

Indoor Swings An indoor swing is a baby chair with padded cover and safety harness which swings backwards and forwards in its own free-standing frame. One make converts from a highchair and swings with the baby's movement. Others are motorised, requiring batteries to operate. A motorised swing may have an adjustable seat, choice of rocking speeds or even play soothing music. Do I need it? All babies love to be rocked and for some babies a swing can be the perfect solution when they

just won't settle and you need to put them down for a while. Motorised swings are more useful for soothing than playing, and babies will often gently nod off to sleep in them. However, they are relatively expensive, require batteries and may not be in use for very long (suitable from birth to around baby weight 11kg). If you have older children or pets, an indoor swing keeps the baby usefully off the ground - if you can persuade older children not to fiddle with it!

Bouncers & Walkers Once your baby is ready for a little extra fun in his life, you can introduce him to activity and movement with a baby bouncer, walker or indoor swing. As with most things designed with babies in mind, this sort of play equipment needs extreme caution - never leave a baby unattended, even for a moment, and follow the manufacturer's instructions and guidelines for use to the letter.

Baby bouncers The most common type of baby bouncer attaches to the top of a door frame, although you can also buy a bouncer with its own, free-standing frame. With both types of bouncer, the baby sits inside a padded fabric seat which supports his body. The seat is suspended from an elasticated strap fixed by a spring-loaded clip to the door frame or free-standing frame. Babies shouldn't go into bouncers until they have full control of their heads, between 3 to 5 months, and should stop using them when they reach the recommended weight maximum which differs according to make, but will probably be around 12kg, or when they show signs of trying to walk. They should be positioned so that their feet just touch the floor, and should only be put in a bouncer for 15 to 20 minutes at a time. Do I need it? Some babies adore bouncers and love the sensation of gently bouncing themselves up and down. Others are very unsure; a sense of freedom for one baby can be insecurity to another. The bonus for mum and dad is that if you're baby enjoys it, it's another place you can put him for a few minutes, particularly on those days when he just doesn't want to be put down. Meanwhile, kicking legs and waving arms will help to strengthen muscles. What to look for

- How much support will it give your baby? Ensure that it has sufficient adjustment to fit snugly around your baby and support his back
- How safe is it? Does it have a safety harness and adjustable straps?
- Does it give him any protection? Some bouncers have plastic or cushioned rings around them to stop the baby bumping into things
- Is it machine washable? If not, how easy will it be to sponge clean?

Safety points

- Never leave a baby in a bouncer unattended
- The door should be wedged open
- Be particularly vigilant when other children are around - they may be tempted to try and swing the baby or may inadvertently close the door - with disastrous results

Baby Walkers This is a seat surrounded by wheels which allows the baby to move themselves around the room before they can walk. Babies should only use them for short periods at time. Babies usually enjoy walkers but some safety experts believe that they should be banned. They need an uncluttered area and constant supervision, otherwise they could topple down stairs or collide with sharp furniture. Do I need it? They will allow your baby mobility but you will need to balance against risks and the need for vigilance on your part. If you have a house with plenty of uncluttered space they may be a good investment. What to look for

- Can it be immobilised? One walker has an automatic stopping system for example for use in the kitchen
- How stable is it - the more stable the better
- What activities does it offer - some have playtrays with activities
- Is the seat height adjustable for when you baby grow bigger
- Does it fold for space saving

Safety points

- Never leave your baby in a walker unattended
- Never use near unguarded stairs or steps
- Never use in a room with a heater or a fire
- Always ensure that there is a clear pathway
- Stop using a walker when your baby takes independent steps

Baby Monitors What is a monitor? A baby monitor allows you to hear or see your baby when you are in different rooms. Systems vary but all have two units - one to transmit your baby's sounds and one for you to have by you for monitoring the baby. The most commonly used monitors are sound monitors but there are also visual monitors with which you can watch your baby on a screen, respiration monitors which check the baby's breathing and child alarms which will warn you if your child is wandering off. Do I need one? If you live in a small house or flat and can hear your baby easily wherever you are then you won't really need a monitor. If the distances between the room your baby sleeps in most and other rooms in your house are greater then a monitor will reassure you that all is well. Respiration monitors sound an alarm if breathing or movement is not detected and may be useful if you are particularly anxious - they can be used as simple sound monitors if you find the respiration pad becomes an unnecessary feature. TV monitors allow you to watch your baby on screen and can be used as simple sound monitors when a picture is not required. What to look for Sound monitors work through radio waves and you should check for a good reception - the distances they work over varies from 50 to 400 metres. Units are either mains or battery operated. Mains operated monitors are the simplest and cheapest - but both you and your baby must be positioned near a plug which limits their flexibility. Battery operated monitors are entirely portable. Some come with rechargeable batteries which can save the expense and fuss of new batteries, others come with adapters for optional mains use. Features Features vary but may include: A moving lights display - indicating baby's distress when muted A choice of channels to help improve reception A volume control A night light on the baby unit A room temperature indicator A low power and/or out of range warning Clips with which to position baby and/or parent unit Clock Respiration monitors also use pads placed under the baby's mattress which can detect movement and breathing. Features may include an optional alarm that sounds when no movement is detected for more than 20 seconds. These monitors will either reassure or terrify you half to death. Most new parents worry a great deal about their baby's breathing. Babies often have very shallow, hardly noticeable breathing or irregular breathing patterns and it is quite normal to be nervous and to keep checking, often unnecessarily, on your newborn's breathing. Respiration monitors can be a great comfort and reduce the number of times you visit your baby's room. However, some parents find themselves worrying even more - the monitors come with a lot of advice on infant resuscitation and watching the monitor can become as much of an obsession as watching the baby but without the joys and certainties of seeing & being with your baby. Vision monitors have sound and visual monitoring features but also show your baby on a screen - either a dedicated monitor or through your own TV. They may have to be physically connected by cables through the house and may not be very portable. They can be expensive but can be used later for keeping an eye in a neighbouring room while a toddler is at play or for home security.