

Cost-cutting Top Tips for new parents

By Dr. Lin Day, Baby Sensory (www.babysensory.com)

Expectant parents can spend thousands of pounds on baby clothes, toys and other essentials before the birth. However, as many experienced parents will know, most items can be obtained at little or no expense and without depriving babies of anything that they really need. In fact, a new baby needs relatively little, except clothes, love, warmth and food.



With help from friends and family, and a little creativity, new parents can get by on even the strictest budget. The following 20 top tips may save you a fortune:

1. Don't buy a bigger car. All that you need is a back seat for your baby.
2. Aim to breast feed your baby. This is not only good for your baby, but it also saves money on formula milk and other sterilising gear.
3. Before buying baby clothes, toys and other items, invite your friends around for a baby shower. Keep the tags and receipts so that you can exchange unwanted gifts for things that you want or need.
4. Borrow the cot, pram, baby bath and other essential items from friends who have had babies. Most will be more than willing to free up space in their homes. There is no need to buy a cot or high chair until your baby needs them.
5. Search out classified advertisements, car boot and NCT sales, charity shops and eBay.co.uk for toys, cots, prams and other large items. Most are in pristine condition and will cost a fraction of their original price.
6. Buy second-hand baby clothes. Because babies grow out of them so quickly, they are usually in mint condition.
7. Invest in reusable nappies. They are better for the environment and washing them in a machine is easy. If you decide not to use cloth nappies, ask experienced parents to recommend an inexpensive brand. Buying them in bulk can save money and you may gain a few extras free.
8. There is no need to spend money on decorating your baby's nursery. Within the next year or so, you will be redecorating it again. If you don't want to miss

out on the fun, choose a neutral colour and put up some bright pictures to visually stimulate your baby.

9. Cut and hem bed sheets for cot and pram bedding. As a general guide, a cot is half the size of a single bed and a pram is about a quarter the size.
10. Avoid buying things that you don't need straight away. You could end up with items that you never use. Once your baby has arrived, you will probably find that friends and family have bought most of the things that you need anyway.
11. Look out for special offers, competitions and coupons online. There are plenty of sites that offer free baby things.
12. Avoid spending money on expensive baby toys. Safe household objects such as plastic measuring cups and spoons or a plastic spatula will provide just as much interest.
13. Draw black outlines of faces on white paper and laminate family photographs. After the birth, they will keep your baby stimulated, happy and entertained.
14. Use a dressing table as a changing area for your new baby. A soft blanket will serve as a changing pad and rubber underlay will keep it in place.
15. Make your own sling or baby pouch. There are plenty of sewing instructions that can be downloaded from the internet.
16. There is no need to buy a baby bouncer or support seat. Your newborn baby will gain more benefit from lying face down on a soft blanket or quilt during supervised waking hours. Toys can be sewn along the sides for extra interest.
17. Make full use of the library for music and books and free story time for babies.
18. Share your favourite music with your baby before and after the birth. It is well known that newborn babies are soothed by the sounds that they heard in utero.
19. To keep your baby clean, all that you need is a good supply of cotton wool and warm water. A large bowl or sink will be ideal for bathing your baby.
20. If you decide to co-sleep with your baby, this will reduce the need to buy a crib or cot. However, you may want to consider having a Moses basket on hand for the first few months.

Safety

It is worth investing in a good quality car seat and cot mattress. You need to be completely sure that a second hand car seat has not been damaged in an accident and that the fixtures and inside are safe. If you know the history of a second hand cot mattress, and you are sure that it has been stored well, that it is firm and without marks or stains, it might be safe to use. However, if you are in any doubt, buy a new one.

A new breast pump is an essential purchase. A second hand pump may contain dangerous organisms from the previous user.

Check that the brakes on a second hand pushchair or pram work properly. They must contain the British Standard sticker BS7409. If not, they may not meet the latest safety standards.

Check that second hand toys bear the CE or Lion mark and that they do not have finger traps, magnets, buttons, beads, small parts or sharp points that could present a serious hazard. If the toy fits through a kitchen roll cylinder then it is not safe. Toys that have long cords should also be avoided, since they can cause strangulation.

Avoid buying second hand mains powered electrical items or clothes with a drawstring neck.

If you do have doubts about the safety of a second hand item, carry out an online search to be sure that it is not a recalled product.