



Highlights: Diaper Prices

The average infant needs 2,700 diaper changes in the first year. That's a mountain of diapers—and a pile of money. In an effort to give parents some financial help in the early years, *Bay Area Consumers' Checkbook* (online at www.checkbook.org) is releasing its latest price survey of diaper and formula prices.

The bottom line

- Checkbook's undercover shoppers checked prices for five diaper brands/sizes at area supermarkets, big-box discounters, membership warehouse clubs, Amazon, and more. At each store, Checkbook also looked for the cheapest available brand, including store brands. Because same-size packages are rarely stocked from store to store, Checkbook shopped for the least expensive way to buy diapers on a per-diaper basis for each chosen brand/size.
- Per-diaper prices for a typical model—Huggies Little Snugglers, size 2—at surveyed stores ranged from \$.17 using Amazon Family with its Subscribe & Save discounts to \$.19 at Costco to \$.39 at CVS. A 20-cent price difference may not seem like a lot. But those who change seven diapers a day will quickly realize that a 20-cent per diaper difference works out to \$511 per year in savings.
- For the products Checkbook priced, the clear price winner among surveyed retailers was Amazon Family (available only to Prime members), coupled with its Subscribe & Save program. It offered prices 27 percent lower than the average for all the retailers Checkbook shopped, 21 percent lower even than Walmart, the lowest-priced local outlet.
- Other price leaders were Sam's Club, Costco, and Target, which also offers a subscription discount program.
- For some families, formula is also a major expense. Checkbook's survey included two formula brands and, as with diapers, Checkbook shopped for the least expensive way to buy each brand of formula—this time on a per-ounce basis. The stores with the lowest formula prices were, for the most part, the same as those with low diaper prices.

Getting the most for your diaper dollars

- How much you spend on diapers depends as much on how you buy them as on where you buy them. In general, the more nappies per package, the lower the per-unit price. For the most part, Checkbook found that the lowest-cost retailers have enough shelf space to stock large-quantity packages. And no matter where you shop, buying a box of 120-plus diapers likely will save you 15 to 20 percent compared to purchasing packages of 20 to 30 diapers.
- Though nabbing large packages can cut per-diaper prices, for an infant don't buy in bulk: Your little one likely will outgrow small sizes long before going through 234 diapers.
- Several of the lowest-cost sellers charge annual membership fees: Costco's is \$60 and Sam's Club's is \$45. To get the rock-bottom prices offered by Amazon Family, you'll have to pay \$99 a year for Amazon Prime. You'll have to decide whether the savings and benefits you get from membership with one of these sellers justifies the annual fee.
- Amazon Family has by far the lowest prices for brand-name diapers, but you can get very low prices from Amazon without signing up for Prime by using its Subscribe & Save. You get a five percent discount on diapers if you use Subscribe & Save to schedule automatic periodic deliveries. There are no requirements in terms of how often you have to schedule orders and you can cancel or change your order at any time before it is shipped, and you can even skip deliveries.

- Target also offers a subscription discount when you buy online. Like Amazon’s program, Target gives a five percent discount when you schedule regular deliveries of household products, and you can cancel subscriptions at any time. But Checkbook found Amazon’s subscription prices are about six percent lower than Target’s.
- Try store brands. Among local stores Checkbook shopped, store brands were often available at prices that were competitive with Amazon Family and the warehouse clubs—and you don’t have to pay a membership fee or wait for deliveries.
- Before trying any new brand or size of diapers, buy a small package to see how it performs for your child. Some parents swear by inexpensive house brands sold at discount chains; others find only more expensive brand-name lines reliable enough. Since every kid is different, you’ll need a little trial and error to find out what’s best for yours.
- Because most local stores stock a small variety of diapers, if you want to buy specialty diapers you might have to shop online. Only some local stores stocked two of the brands of specialty diapers Checkbook shopped for: Seventh Generation and Huggies GoodNites.
- Converting to cloth diapers might save you money compared to buying disposables at a low-cost retailer—but only if you choose a low-cost brand and wash them yourself. (Diaper cleaning services charge higher fees than what you’d pay for disposables.)

Checkbook’s editors are available for interviews. Please contact Jamie Lettis at 202-454-3006 or jlettis@checkbook.org to schedule.

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