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nursery necessities

Our no-nonsense guide to what you really need (and what you don't)

When it comes to setting up your nursery, less can be more. As you eagerly await the arrival of your precious little one, we give you the lowdown on what you'll really need, what would be nice but not necessary, and what you should think of returning if you're given one.

must-haves

1 CRIB

Many moms opt to have their newborn at arm's length for peace of mind and ease of nighttime feedings. But when you're ready to say goodbye to the bassinette or the co-sleeper, it's crib time. There are lots of options—from the no-nonsense basics to those that convert first to a toddler bed and then a single bed. Think about your short- and long-term needs and plans for the room, and shop accordingly.

2 BABY MONITOR

My mom swears my twin brother and I slept through the night at three weeks. I swear *she* just slept through our wailings. Today there's no excuse: a monitor provides peace-of-mind that your baby is okay, as well as letting you know when she does, indeed, require attention. She'll thank you for it when she's older.

3 CHANGING TABLE

Sure, you can put a pad on the floor and avoid a specially designed table, but seriously, a table can be welcome relief for your knees and back. A long dresser with an attachable changer can work well, or you can go ahead and spurge on a *bona fide* changing table, complete with handy shelves for storing diapers, wipes, etc. Just make sure that you utilize those safety straps!

4 DIAPERS

Go green with the cloth diaper route; the newest options are light years from what our moms might have used. You'll save both money and room in the landfills. Or, give into convenience (and save wear and tear

on your washer and dryer) and use disposables. Whatever you choose, plan to have plenty at the ready from day one.

5 DIAPER PAIL

For disposables, Diaper Gene and its competitors offer great odor-reducing designs. If you're going the cloth route, you'll need a pail for storing the soiled diapers till they make it to the washing machine. Get a nylon tote that fits within your pail to make transporting (and clean up) easier, too.

6 BURPING CLOTHS

The name is a misnomer; they're really spit-up cloths. They can be part of a cute, matching bib set, or just a bunch of cheap cloth diapers. Whatever you use, you'll be using them a lot, so go ahead and stock up.

7 CHAIR

I always loved those swanky stuffed rockers with matching foot stools. Alas, I ended up using a decades-old wicker rocker that had previously been in my living room. Wherever you find yours, you'll be glad to have it for feedings, readings and more.

8 NIGHTLIGHT

Often overlooked, but so helpful when sneaking about to check on a sleeping baby; it's also great for late-night feedings. To avoid future dependency on nightlights (and perhaps a subsequent fear of the dark?) consider removing the nightlight once your baby starts sleeping through the night.

9 BABY HEALTH BOOK

Wondering about those blocked tear ducts or weird spots on the thighs? Put your mind at ease by having a pediatrician-approved health book for your baby's first year.

10 FAN

A year ago this wouldn't have made our list. Since then, researchers have discovered that infants sleeping in a room with a running fan had a 72 percent lower risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) than infants sleeping in rooms without fans. 'Nuff said for us to make this a nursery necessity!

nice, but not necessary

CRIB MOBILE

It can get mighty boring for a baby to stare at the ceiling. A colorful mobile can help stimulate brain development while entertaining an

infant. We favor the battery-operated kind, lest we become a slave to a wind-up model.

BABY BATHTUB

Okay, so it's not really a "nursery" item, but we're throwing it into this category. Infants can only fit into the kitchen sink for so long. Eventually, you'll have to move them to the tub. And your tub is frightfully big. A baby bathtub saves on water while making things more manageable.

BOTTLE WARMER

It's pretty convenient for those late-night feedings of your refrigerated breast milk or formula. And you won't have to worry about over-heating the bottle on the stove top or getting hot-spots with the microwave.

NURSING PILLOW

Sure, you can nurse without one. But a nursing pillow can make things easier. Even for bottle-feeding your baby.

HUMIDIFIER

Cool mist humidifiers help keep tender nasal passages from becoming dried out as well as help soothe discomforts from colds. Make sure to change the filters according to the manufacturer's directions.

skip and save your money

CRIB BUMPERS

Sure they're cute. But they increase a baby's risk of SIDS, and thus should be removed each and every time your infant is in her crib. That's a huge hassle in our book, so we're kicking the bumpers to the curb.

WIPES WARMER

Seriously, this is an unnecessary expense, and an added drain on your electric bill (okay, very small drain). If you're really concerned about the shock of a chilly wipe on your little one's bum, then run the wipe under warm water first, which will have the added benefit of rinsing away any soap-like solution which might irritate sensitive skin.

REMOTE FEVER MONITOR

If your baby is sick, you will know it by his crying, or lethargy, or refusal to be fed, etc. And when you pick him up, if he has a fever, you'll likely catch on and grab a thermometer. A remote monitor can give a false sense of security that all is fine when it's not (say if the batteries fail, or it's attached incorrectly), or make you so neurotic you're always checking it.

BABY CRYING ANALYZER

Hungry? Bored, Tired? Stressed? Uncomfortable? This latest nursery device "listens" to an infant's cry and then evaluates its pitch, power, frequency and on and on and within 20 seconds identifies for which of the five reasons your baby is crying, based upon preprogrammed information. But experts say that it takes several months for a baby to develop "specific" cries, and in that time we trust parents can tune into them directly, without the assistance of a \$120 electronic interpreter.

RECEIVING BLANKETS

Maybe you can make use of a couple to swaddle your newborn. But if you're still swaddling after a few weeks, you'll find them too small anyway. Invest in a sleep sack (ideally without arms) instead.