

## Oh Baby!

By Kelli B. Grant  
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**IF YOUR BABY WASN'T** born with a silver spoon in her mouth, chances are you've bought one for her. Along with a matching bowl, no less.

During their child's first year, parents with an annual income of \$72,600 or more will spend about \$15,200 on baby. This includes everything from formula, diapers and toys, to medical care, according to the government's 2005 Expenditures on Children by Families<sup>1</sup> report. By the time that child is six years old, the tab will run \$92,280. (Sounds like a lot...until you compare this to future college bills<sup>2</sup>.)

Retailers and advertisers prey on the vulnerability of new parents, says Josh Lerman, a senior editor at Parenting magazine. Naturally, they want you think that your baby needs the best — and that means it's time to spend.

Fact is, you can scrimp on certain products — while others you really *should* shell out big bucks for. Here are some dos and don'ts:

**Do: Collect coupons.** "Marketers love new moms, and they do throw a lot of freebies at them," says Alan Fields, co-author of the book "Baby Bargains." "Is it a come-on? Yeah. But it can be fun and frugal to collect some of these freebies."

For lists of deals, check out the message boards at Fat Wallet<sup>3</sup> and Baby Bargains<sup>4</sup>. Be sure to create a separate e-mail address to use when signing up for all these offers. That way, you won't still be getting spam about diaper deals when Connor or Leyna is heading off to the senior prom.

**Don't: Use hand-me-down gear.** Used clothes are fine, but used strollers, car seats, walkers and cribs are a no-no, warns Kathleen Huddy of the Good Housekeeping Institute. The crib you used as a baby likely won't meet today's safety standards, which require bars be no more than 2-3/8" apart and have no decorative cut-outs. Plus, there's no telling an item's history. "It could have been a recall, and you don't know it," she says. Look instead for new items that are certified by the Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association, which means the item has been designed and tested to the highest safety standards.

**Do: Lean on experienced parents.** Whether you're having trouble picking one of the 364 car seats at Babies 'R' Us, or debating over the need for the celebrity-mom must have — the \$729 Bugaboo Frog stroller<sup>5</sup> — use other parents as a resource, advises Lerman. They've already tested the waters.

**Don't: Shop at baby-specialty retailers.** Here, "baby" becomes a four-letter word, says Fields. Expect to pay more at these specialty stores, particularly for items that aren't strictly baby-related. For example, Babies 'R' Us offers a white five-drawer dresser<sup>6</sup> by baby product manufacturer Storkcraft for \$229. It is made of wood and composite wood with a laminate finish. Target, meanwhile, offers a similar all-wood dresser<sup>7</sup> for \$149.99. (They also carry the Storkcraft dresser — for \$10 less than the Babies 'R' Us price.)

**Do: Join the club.** Diapers, formula, lotions and wipes can add up — to big discounts. Most grocery stores have a baby club component to their frequent buyer program. Winn-Dixie gives \$10 reward certificates for every \$200 spent on baby products. Albertson's ducklings program offers a free magazine subscription and seasonal coupons.

Also take time to join your local warehouse club, advises Fields. According to a June 2005 report by Consumer Reports, clubs such as BJ's, Costco and Sam's Club discount diapers by as much as 35% and formula by 20%. You'll also find discount clothing and other one-time baby necessities like cribs and car seats.

Skimp on...	
Product	Why
<b>Diapers</b>	Frightening fact: You'll go through about 8,000 diapers per child, according to Consumer Reports. You may notice small differences between generic diapers and their brand-name counterparts, but there's no significant difference in performance. At a cost of 10 cents to 30 cents per diaper, this "drip-drip expense" adds up quickly, says Fields. Going generic will save you about 20%.
<b>Newborn clothes</b>	You'll get plenty of these as gifts, says Lerman, so there's no need to go out and get more on your own. "Buy things that are a little big," he advises. And of course, check with neighbors and friends for hand-me-downs.
Splurge on...	
Product	Why
<b>Car seat</b>	More expensive models tend to have better design and easier adjustment, says Fields. That means you'll keep baby safe and spend less time fiddling with straps.
<b>Crib</b>	All new cribs are manufactured to meet U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission standards. But it's a good idea to shell out a little extra for sturdy construction, says Huddy.
<b>Formula</b>	Stick with the brand names, advises Huddy. Generic formulas, though less expensive, don't always have consistent nutrient levels from batch to batch.

Links in this article:

<sup>1</sup><http://www.usda.gov/cnpp/Crc/crc2005.pdf>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.smartmoney.com/college/>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.fatwallet.com>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.babybargains.com>

<sup>5</sup>[http://www.babystyle.com/common/dProductDetail.asp?SIND=1&PMId=13235&siteid=froogle\\_bugaboofrogcompletestroller&cm\\_mmc=Froogle\\_-\\_baby\\_gear\\_-\\_na\\_-\\_bugaboofrogcompletestroller](http://www.babystyle.com/common/dProductDetail.asp?SIND=1&PMId=13235&siteid=froogle_bugaboofrogcompletestroller&cm_mmc=Froogle_-_baby_gear_-_na_-_bugaboofrogcompletestroller)

<sup>6</sup>[http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/B00029TCQM/qid=1145459258/sr=2-3/ref=pd\\_bbs\\_b\\_2\\_3/002-9091526-4992816?v=glance&s=baby](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/B00029TCQM/qid=1145459258/sr=2-3/ref=pd_bbs_b_2_3/002-9091526-4992816?v=glance&s=baby)

<sup>7</sup>[http://www.target.com/gp/detail.html/sr=1-1/qid=1145460687/ref=sr\\_1\\_1/601-4252521-0090509?%5Fencoding=UTF8&asin=B000068E70](http://www.target.com/gp/detail.html/sr=1-1/qid=1145460687/ref=sr_1_1/601-4252521-0090509?%5Fencoding=UTF8&asin=B000068E70)

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