

Clothing Hints for Young Children

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A baby or young child cannot be expected to cooperate very much in the job of dressing. Many are far more interested in taking clothes off than putting them on! Some will be cooperative and enjoy being dressed while others will be a greater challenge.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT INFLUENCES CLOTHING

The rate of physical development and coordination varies from child to child. For almost all children, it is rapid during the early years; the first year an average child gains 12 to 14 pounds and grows 10 inches. Because of this rapid growth rate, clothing should be selected with “short term” use in mind. Few items are needed—especially if a washer and dryer are available for daily use—but they should be of good quality fabric and durable construction. It is seldom practical to buy a large number of any item smaller than the 12 to 18-month size; smaller sizes will be quickly outgrown.

Children’s interest in clothing changes as their coordination and bodies develop. Here are a few general guidelines:

10 to 12 months	Will extend arms and legs when being dressed.
18 months	Takes off socks, mittens, unzips zippers, tries to put on shoes.
2 years	Helps pull up or push down pants, removes shoes if untied, helps put arms in sleeves, legs in pants.
3 years	Can dress self with assistance, but has trouble distinguishing front from back and right from left.
4 years	Can dress self if given help with small fasteners and ties, undresses self.
5 years	Can dress and undress self

CLOTHES FOR EASY DRESSING

Young children seldom like being dressed, so select garments that are easy to put on and take off. Avoid outfits that have several pieces that must be put on one at a time and items with lots of buttons, zippers or snaps. To reduce dressing time struggles, avoid garments that must be pulled over the head. Or, select pullover tops that open on the shoulder to allow the garment to be slipped on quickly. Remember, baby’s arms and legs are like an adult’s—only smaller—so, don’t try to force a child’s limbs into garment openings by twisting and pulling them in uncomfortable directions.

Some self-help features to look for in clothing for young children include:

- Front openings or large neck openings
- Simple fasteners—large buttons preferred
- Zippers with large pull rings
- Elastic waistline instead of belt or sash
- Marks to identify front and back, right and left
- Easy-to-use pockets

COMFORTABLE CLOTHING IS IMPORTANT

Comfort is an important factor to consider when selecting children’s clothing. There are three main aspects of comfort to consider:

Temperature. Clothing can cause children to be uncomfortably warm or cool. Comfortable clothing will allow absorption and ventilation so that body moisture can evaporate easily. Cotton and cotton-blend fabrics are absorbent and comfortable for small children. One hundred percent synthetic fabrics, which usually are nonabsorbent, are uncomfortable for children in warm weather. Give special consideration to baby’s comfort if disposable diapers are used frequently. These diapers do not allow ventilation; skin irritation may result if care is not taken.

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Restriction. Children do not enjoy wearing clothing that restricts body movement. Clothing that is too small or too large can inhibit body movement and interfere with a child’s activities. Avoid uncomfortably small necklines, armholes, sleeves, waistlines and elastic that is too tight. Too large clothing that twists around the body or trips the child also should be avoided.

Irritating textures. Harsh, scratchy fabrics, fasteners and seam finishes can irritate a child’s sensitive skin. Clothing made from soft cotton or cotton-blend fabrics are comfortable and easy to care for. Knitted fabrics are excellent choices for young children’s clothing because they:

- allow ventilation, yet give warmth.
- mold to the shape of the body without restricting body movement.
- are soft against the skin.
- “stretch” to make dressing easier.

Be sure to check the construction of each garment to avoid bulky seams and scratchy fasteners. Heavy zippers, snaps and buttons will be uncomfortable for the baby to lie on. Metal zippers may be rough and irritate the skin; they can become uncomfortably warm if exposed to the sun for too long.

SAFE CLOTHING FOR LITTLE ONES

Clothing can cause young children to have accidents. Infants whose curiosity is aroused by fancy snaps, buttons or trim, may attempt to pull them off and “eat” them. To avoid such occurrences, be certain these features on any garment are securely attached. Avoid garment decorations, such as ball fringe, fancy zipper pulls and other decorations, which might be pulled off and swallowed by a curious child. Other clothing features to avoid include:

Type of Garment	Accident
Drawstrings at the neck	Strangling
Large pockets, legs, or garments, and long sashes	Falls
Pajamas/paper products not fireproofed (costumes)	Fires
Safety pin without safety head	Sticking
Loose fasteners or buttons	Swallowing

For toddlers and preschoolers, brightly colored garments, especially red and yellow, can offer protection since motorists, busy mothers and babysitters will be able to see the child more easily.

APPROPRIATE CLOTHES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Dress young children according to activities and temperature of surroundings. Select fabrics with temperature in mind—cotton for warm temperatures and synthetics for cool ones. The major activities to consider include:

Sleeping—A baby needs no more in the way of clothing or covering than an adult does. Knitted gowns with mittens on sleeves are a good choice for infants. For little ones, 6 months or older, select pajamas with feet. These will help keep the child warm even when coverings are kicked off during the night. All sleepwear for children is flame retardant, but it must be laundered correctly to maintain this quality. Follow care instructions carefully.

Eating—Small round bibs will absorb drooling and excess liquids from bottle or breast feeding. For babies on solid foods, a large bib of plastic or a combination of cloth backed with plastic will be useful. Pockets across the bottom of the bib to catch food will be helpful, and cloth binding at the neck will add comfort for the child.

Playing—For indoor play, choose stretch play suits, diaper-shirt sets and gowns for small babies. Toddlers will enjoy coveralls, overalls, T-shirts, etc. For playing outdoors, toddlers will need shorts and tops, overalls or shortalls for summer; coveralls, corduroy pants and sweaters (front openings) for winter.

Dress-Up—Most adults like to “show off” baby. They usually try to dress the young child to look especially “pretty.” Select garments for such occasions carefully. Avoid scratchy laces, stiff fabric, etc. Fancy ruffled plastic pants, “cute” shoes and caps may be uncomfortable for small children. Select garments of soft fabric similar to the “everyday” garments the child enjoys wearing. Remember that “dressing-up” will not change the child’s behavior or habits—be sure all dress-up clothes are easy to care for and comfortable to wear.

Originally written by Susan Wright, Extension Consumer Specialist.

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