



ready, set, register!

What products do you really need? What can you do without? And where should you shop? Your answers are all right here—read up, then gear up!

By Meredith Franco Meyers

here's my sorry tale: I was seven months pregnant and hobbled by sciatica when my husband and I got around to registering. We went on a Saturday morning, took in the crowd, the endless aisles of gear, and the runway-style stroller demonstration, and proceeded to hyperventilate.

And that was before we picked up a frighteningly comprehensive registry checklist with headings such as "Safety & Health." We had scribbled the few items we wanted on a napkin. If we failed to register for everything on this list, would we compromise our child's well-being? What if we naively overlooked the necessities? And what is a Beaba, anyway?

Registering for a baby should be lots of fun, yet the process causes many

otherwise even-keeled parents-to-be to panic. Mom of three J. J. Ghatt, an attorney who blogs at BellyItchBlog.com, offers one possible explanation. "When you register, you're mindful that everyone in your life, from your mom to your in-laws to your friends, is going to buy something for your child," she says. "Their expectations follow you into the store."

In addition to these pressures, you'll probably hear conflicting opinions ("You *have* to ask for swaddle blankets." "You should know that my daughter *hated* to be swaddled."). It's no wonder that weeding through all the product possibilities can confound even the calmest soul. But no need for hysterics. Just follow our guide to making your registry process as painless as possible. And may your labor follow suit!

secrets for happier shopping

Go while you have energy!

Learn from my mistake and shop prior to week 32, if possible. It's a surprisingly taxing task, and you'll enjoy it more if you knock it out in your second trimester rather than waiting until the tiring homestretch. "I went when I was eight months, and I didn't get past the door," says Emily Sosso, 33, mom of 15-month-old Matteo, in Ithaca, New York.



it's like a wedding registry list that notes everything down to the napkin rings. "Few women I know use the wipes warmer or the pacifier sterilizer that is on so many checklists," Ghatt says.

Watch big-ticket items.

It may take time for the factory to ship furniture to you. "I had an anxiety attack when I learned the glider would take more than a month," says Gali Katz, of Brooklyn, mom of 15-month-old Noa. Register for special-order pieces, but buy them yourself if no one purchases them by about week 34.

Register here and there.

You can choose crib bedding at one store if you're smitten by a certain print, for instance, but opt for basic gear such as a stroller and car seat at another company. Doing so widens your selection and gives your family and friends a variety of places to shop.

Visit a brick-and-mortar store at least once, even if you register online.

It helps to see and test baby gear before you buy it. Pushing strollers, standing next to cribs, and feeling the softness of a sheet will help you make informed decisions.

Bring a friend who really knows her (baby) stuff.

Ideally you'll want to fill out your registry with a buddy who has had a baby within the last two years and is familiar with all the latest offerings (um, Moby Wrap, anyone?) in a way that your husband or mother never could be. Also, rather than quizzing a store employee, it helps if you can ask a mom-friend questions like "Why would I need breast ointment?"

Take the store's registry list with a grain of salt.

You won't need everything on it. Many items are merely suggestions;

Should You Register for #2?

Registering for your first baby is a given, but people have mixed feelings about wish lists for any siblings that follow. In a study by the Meredith Parents Network MomTrak™, 9 out of 10 first-time moms said they registered, but the number fell to just over half of moms having a subsequent baby. Moms are more likely to register for a second child if they know the baby is a different sex or if there are more than a few years between kids. If they don't register, it's usually because they plan to reuse items they own—or they worry that a gift list is inappropriate for a second or third child. Our view? Put down a handful of gifts. Friends are likely to buy a present whether you're having your first or your fourth, so you may as well help them out with ideas. Doesn't every baby deserve a few new things?

AFTER THE SHOWER

Keep tags on, and save gift receipts!

That way if, say, your baby never wears an outfit before she's on to the next size, exchanges are easy.

Hold on to packaging for easier returns.

"The store took back a baby carrier after my son made it clear he hated to ride in it," J. J. Ghatt says. "I just folded it neatly back in the box."

Consider keeping duplicates. If you get two activity mats or baby seats, send one to Grandma's house.

Ask Dad-to-be for his input.

Consider how he'd like to participate in the process. Expectant dads seem to fall into two camps; those (like my husband) who monopolize the scanner and go hog wild with it, or the guys who are so out of their element in the baby store that they become mute and paralyzed. Many men are better at research than decision making at the store. "My husband analyzed cribs and car seats using *Consumer Reports* before we decided on one," says Lori Silverstein, a Houston mom of two. "I really valued that." Similarly, your fella might want to

browse user opinions on Amazon.com or BabiesRUs.com. Or maybe his job will be to build the crib and swing once they arrive, rather than pick them out. Of course, there's always the chance that he's a better shopper than you are! Only you can guess what his best role will be.

Register for everything your little heart desires.

Retailers, including Babies "R" Us and Pottery Barn Kids, let you buy what you don't receive at 10 to 15 percent less after the baby arrives—as long as it was on your list. It's called the "registry completion" discount. So even if you doubt anyone will buy a high chair, list it, then buy it at a reduction later.

Don't forget the diapers!

A year's supply costs \$500 to \$1,000, so having a few months' worth saves a bundle. Go for several sizes (newborn, size 1, size 2) and brands. You don't yet know which you and Baby will prefer, so you shouldn't overcommit. That goes for bottles too.

Select some small stuff.

Baby bath wash, wipes, pacifier pockets. Even diaper cream. "Someone will happily grab a bunch of \$5 things for you," Ghatt says.

Know that nothing's final.

Most stores have sites that let you add, switch, and delete items at whim. If you're stuck with registry remorse (a common condition!), go in and tinker.

Hot Now: Pro Baby Shoppers

Still befuddled? Baby concierge services want to help. New York City has **TheBabyGuyNYC.com**; in the Los Angeles area, see **TheBabyPlanners.com**. There's also **ItsABelly.com**, with branches in the Carolinas, Kansas City, Portland, San Francisco, and Seattle. But be warned that a "registry consult" over the phone can cost \$75 to \$100 per hour. And if you want someone to shop in a store with you, watch out: A concierge who requested anonymity said her charge is \$225 per outing. Prices aside, these services are not only for *Real Housewife* types; they can save the overwhelmed. "We adopted our daughter from Korea and weren't sure when she'd arrive or how old she'd be," a mom named Sarah tells us. "We used a cool site, **PremierBabyConcierge.com**, to register and even totally babyproof our house. It made the transition to motherhood much easier."

"WHAT I WANT THE MOST IS..."

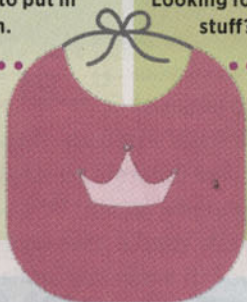
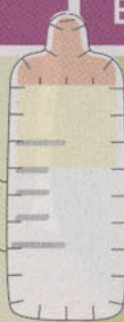
When *American Baby* asks pregnant women to name their ideal present, it's usually a gift card to a store that has their registry. Some moms-to-be are even having baby showers with a "gift card" theme, where guests lavish them with cards from all over: a baby store, a salon, a bookstore, a coffee shop, you name it. Sounds good to us—sure beats getting ten receiving blankets!





Who's Got

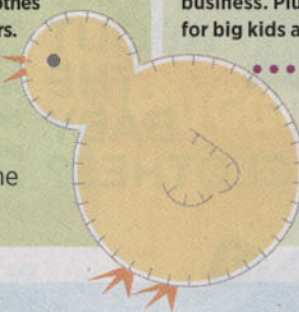
	Walmart	Target	Babies "R" Us	Amazon.com
The scene	Ubiquitous megastore that sells everything on the planet	Mass retailer that gives everyday items a hip edge	Baby superstore with hundreds of locations	Online giant with a vast network offering nearly anything you want
Price range	\$	\$	\$-\$\$	\$-\$\$\$
Known for...	Giving you the most bang for your buck	Making affordable still squeal-worthy	Putting everything for Baby under one roof	Posting honest ratings and reviews from real people
The cribs are...	Bargains: Online, we found a Storkcraft Sheffield Stages crib for only \$99.	Classic: You'll find most on their website, like the Graco Lauren crib, \$160.	Innovative: Check out the \$400 Sorelle Tuscany combo crib-changer.	Simple: Customers recommend DaVinci's Kalani crib, \$250.
Best-selling stroller	Evenflo's Aura Select travel system, \$139	Graco's Alano travel system, \$171	Baby Trend's Expedition travel system, \$220	Kolcraft's Jeep Liberty three-wheeler, \$129
Highlight of the website	Click on the "Baby Registry Tour" button, and it will walk you through the entire process right online.	You can find certain items, such as limited-time clothing collections, online even after stores run out.	Like to know what others think? Read the comments on BabiesRUs.com and its sister site, ToysRUs.com.	A star rating system helps you make decisions. You'll love that users add photos of gear, plus lists of faves.
Customer service	A chain this big and popular is perpetually crowded. You may be on your own some days.	Sales associates tend to get swamped on weekends; try going on a weekday and hope for the best.	They're crowded, but several branches offer special services, such as assembling your stroller.	It's not easy to talk to a live person, but there's almost no end to the information you can read on a product.
A peek at the return policy	Return within 90 days of purchase for store credit or exchange, with occasional exceptions.	Return within 90 days of purchase, but many shoppers say associates are nicely lenient.	Return within 90 days of purchase, with a few exceptions (e.g., you can't return breast pumps).	The special year-long return window for most baby items is insanely generous. You do all the paperwork online.
Stand-out feature	Frugalistas, unite! Sometimes getting the best possible price is the only thing that matters.	Their exclusive prints turn a play yard into something you'd be proud to put in your living room.	BRU often gets first dibs on products when they launch. Looking for the newest stuff? It's likely here.	Join Amazon Mom for "Prime" status; get free two-day shipping on baby goods (and much else).
Good if you...	Already shop at Walmart and know your friends and relatives do too.	Adore Target's aesthetics and prices.	Want to see and touch a whole lot of baby items.	Enjoy online shopping, devour reviews, and like to post your own critiques too.



the Goods?

8 SOURCES
THAT WILL
GET YOU
SET UP
FOR BABY

Diapers.com	Buy Buy Baby	Giggle	Pottery Barn Kids
Online one-stop shop for baby supplies, now owned by Amazon.com	Like Bed, Bath & Beyond for baby, with 40 stores around the country	Über-hip catalog, website, and 13 boutiques located in several cities	Catalog, website, and 84 stores that translate the PB look for tots
\$-\$\$\$	\$-\$\$\$	\$\$-\$\$\$	\$\$-\$\$\$
Providing superfast, often free, shipping right to your door	Giving stellar in-store customer service and advice	Finding thoughtfully designed, eco-friendly options	Showcasing gorgeous and inspiring nurseries
Deals: We spotted a promotion for free shipping on DaVinci's Reagan crib, \$230.	Special: BBB is one of the few stores that sells the \$800 round Stokke Sleepi.	Modern: Check out Bloom's sleek, foldable, solid birch Alma Papa for \$700.	Sturdy: The farmhouse-inspired Brookfield has a teething guard built in to the rail, \$700.
Chicco's Cortina KeyFit travel system, \$295	UppaBaby's Vista, \$680	Baby Jogger's City Mini, \$240	No strollers (or car seats or infant swings) here!
You'll find many ways to search: by brand, what sells best, what's newest, and more.	It's easy to navigate. But for freebies such as a registry goody bag, head to your local store.	Online gear guides clearly explain why certain baby products are so necessary and exactly what features to look for in them.	Luscious photography makes you swoon, much as it does in their catalog. You won't be able to resist browsing the beautifully coordinated rooms.
The online "registry assistant" reminds you of anything you overlooked.	On most days, a cheery associate will stick with you as your personal shopper.	Employees are knowledgeable about the well-edited inventory and happy to chat; registering can be fast and fun.	Near a store? Schedule a free consultation with a nursery designer, who may even pay you a visit at home.
Return anything in its original package up to 365 days after purchasing it. For most returns, shipping is free.	Return within 90 days of your baby shower or purchase. After that, you can get credit, but only for unopened items.	Return within 30 days of purchase for a full refund. After that, you'll receive merchandise credit.	Return up to 90 days from the event you're registered for (usually your shower), but you can't return personalized items.
Use their services to save space at home. For instance, they'll wait till Baby turns 4 months to mail you the Exersaucer.	BBB inspires loyalty. They even have a referral program: You receive \$25 off \$100 for each friend you send here to register.	If you're green-minded, you'll love Giggle. A "Better Basics" line has organic clothes and natural cleaners.	PBK helps make things <i>yours</i> ; monogramming is a big part of business. Plus, they've got lots for big kids as peewee grows.
Thrill to have baby staples delivered right to your house. Get a case of 500 wipes while still in pj's!	Would prefer a sales associate to fill you in on pros and cons before you make big decisions.	Want to be told, more or less, "Here's the one to buy."	The nursery is your focus, and you want it to be perfect.



what you really need the first year

In the spirit of my grandma, Naomi, who said, "All a kid needs is food, love, and a bed," I've winnowed the usual gigundo registry checklist to the essentials—admittedly a bit more than food and a bed. You may want to register for additional items, but you'll rely on these things for sure.

The Bare Necessities

Raising your baby will be a challenge, but it would be downright crazy without the buys below.

Nursery

- ☐ crib
- ☐ crib mattress
- ☐ 2 fitted crib sheets
- ☐ 2 waterproof crib mattress pads
- ☐ baby monitor
- ☐ changing pad and 2 pad covers
- ☐ diapers and wipes
- ☐ diaper cream
- ☐ 6 bodysuits

Gear

- ☐ infant car seat
- ☐ activity mat
- ☐ stroller
- ☐ baby carrier
- ☐ bouncy seat

Bathroom

- ☐ infant bathtub
- ☐ 2 hooded towels
- ☐ 4–6 wash cloths
- ☐ baby wash
- ☐ baby shampoo
- ☐ first aid kit with nail clippers and nasal aspirator

Feeding

- ☐ nursing pillow
- ☐ burp cloths
- ☐ 6 bottles
- ☐ bottle brush
- ☐ breast pump if you intend to pump, or formula if you plan to formula-feed

Seriously Optional

Forgoing these will not infringe upon Baby's survival. But they're nice to have!

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> infant swing | <input type="checkbox"/> hamper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> portable crib | <input type="checkbox"/> night-light |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Moses basket or bassinet | <input type="checkbox"/> cool-mist humidifier |
| <input type="checkbox"/> glider or rocking chair | <input type="checkbox"/> diaper bag |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2–3 swaddling blankets | <input type="checkbox"/> nursing cover |
| <input type="checkbox"/> wearable blanket | <input type="checkbox"/> bottle-drying rack |
| <input type="checkbox"/> changing table | <input type="checkbox"/> sterilizer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> diaper pail and liners for it | <input type="checkbox"/> 2–4 fabric bibs |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> 2–4 pacifiers |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> toys |

Ask Now, Use Soon Enough

The newborn phase goes by in a flash! Consider asking ahead for these.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 4-month mark | <input type="checkbox"/> baby-food maker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> foam infant seat | <input type="checkbox"/> 2–4 plastic bibs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> stationary activity center | <input type="checkbox"/> safety gate |
| 6-month mark | 12-month mark |
| <input type="checkbox"/> high chair | <input type="checkbox"/> convertible car seat |
| <input type="checkbox"/> infant bowls and spoons | <input type="checkbox"/> umbrella stroller |

WAIT,
WHAT
ABOUT
THE
BABY
CLOTHES?

You're smart to register for at least a handful of bodysuits because babies go through a lot of them. Sure, you're seeing plenty of other cuteness out there (rompers, pajamas, a hat), but honestly, people will buy or hand off outfits in droves, unasked. If they don't, visit

ThredUp.com (where you can exchange gently used clothing) or sites such as SwapBabyGoods.com and Ebay.com for boxes full of baby duds for next to nothing. Yard sales are another source, and stores constantly have sales on baby clothes. Your kid won't be naked for long!



PLANNING A SHOWER?

Find themes, games, and food—plus an etiquette guide—at parents.com/baby/shower.