

**T**here are few times as celebratory as the birth of a baby. It is the beginning of a new life and a new family configuration. Indeed, overnight, everything is about to be entirely different. It's a time to celebrate. It is also time to practice being the kind of parent that you want to be. Creating a baby shower that reflects your new family's values and interests is a great way to start.

Baby showers are, no surprise, a relatively new tradition brought to us via post World War II America. The culture of "stuff", especially of stuff for children, was born at that time and it wasn't born into a vacuum. Throughout time and across cultures birth has always been celebrated. What most of these traditions have in common – that often gets lost in today's baby shower – is the aspect of "mothering the mother". Nurtured mamas nurture healthy babies. This nurturing (both physical and psychological) is crucial in a mother's breastfeeding success, in helping prevent postpartum depression, and in how thoroughly she heals. In many cultures, in many times, this nurturing was particularly focused on the six weeks after giving birth. Women were encouraged to rest, to eat nutrient-rich foods, and to avoid stimulation. In these cultures, the celebrations often focused on either helping the expectant mother to prepare psychologically for birth, or for this postpartum period.

One of my friends who grew up in India had a baby shower where everyone brought delicious, homemade Indian treats for the expectant parents and bangles for the mother-to-be. These bangles were meant to be taken off, one by one, during the long hours of

the birth. Another friend who had lived in the Middle East for many years chose to have a belly dancer at her baby shower. The women in attendance practiced their "birthing" moves and then soaked the expectant mother's feet and massaged her hands. In some Afghani families and in some Jewish households, the celebrations of birth happen after the baby is born and it usually involves bringing food for the entire family. The gifting of food is common among many traditions and today many women continue this by asking guests to bring a frozen meal to their baby shower in preparation for the exhausting weeks to come.

**A number of today's expectant moms are turning to something called a Blessing Way**, which is supposedly derived from a Navajo tradition, and focuses on nurturing the woman in preparation for the birth, providing support from her community, and using some small "blessing" rituals. For instance, the women attending might share a few words of strength and encouragement for the mom-to-be and then tie their wrists together with a beautiful "cord." Each woman will wear a bit of the cord as a bracelet and when they are told that the expectant mother is in labour, they each think of their labouring friend and cut their bracelet. The mom can wear the bracelet as a reminder of all those women cheering her on during this time. Or, something similar can be done with beeswax candles that a woman burns during her labour and her girl friends and family burn in her honour as a way to share connection. Some women today use their Blessing Way to make a plaster cast of their pregnant belly, which can make for a fun keepsake. Others simply ask their friends to bring a particularly meaningful note, prayer, or poem to share. These can be compiled into

a beautiful book and saved.

**A**t my baby shower I incorporated a women-only part where we painted my belly and shared positive birth experiences and a larger celebration that included my husband and our many long-distance friends and family. We had everyone decorate small, triangular flags for the baby and I strung them together to make a garland that still hangs in her room. For gifts, I asked people to bring one hand-me-down (book or thing) that had been really helpful or beloved in their own parenting or green life.

**Whatever you choose to do, DO have a celebration of some sort!** Just because you are green, conscious, or into simpler living doesn't mean you shouldn't have fun and be supported. If we don't celebrate the big things, then how will we learn to honour the little things: the first step, the first tooth, the first time everybody sleeps through the night? Let the baby shower truly be a celebration of your intentions for parenting: make it every bit as fun, green, and thoughtful

as you want it to be. It'll be good practice for everything that comes after!

**G**etting support in the form of gifts of food, services, or a few truly needed items will let your community participate in supporting you during this time, without bogging you down in a bunch more stuff you don't really want. If you talk to experienced parents, they always have a list of the stuff they were tricked into buying or were given as a gift that they really didn't need. These things aren't just unnecessary and hard on the planet, they come to be annoying when you trip over them on the way to the bathroom in the middle of the night. There are also a few items that experienced parents will say they loved and never want to be without. You want to be very careful to direct your loving, well-intentioned family and friends away from the plastic baby-wipe warmer and towards that thing you really need.

## Registries

**The best way to get what you need is to ask for it.** Don't register at places like Babies 'R Us unless you are prepared for all the other stuff Great Aunt Matilda is going to grab for little Johnny when she goes there to get the one organic toy you wanted. Instead, register at your cool, local, green baby store. This way you can go there and see for yourself what you love, take a cloth diapering class, and then register for what you want online. Then, local friends can go to the store and out-of-town friends can just as easily shop online. Also, if something goes wrong and you want to return something, you already know you like lots of what is in the store. If you want to compile a registry of a variety of specific, green things, including a cloth diaper service, an organic mattress, and maybe even a home-made baby bed from Etsy, you can do this at Babyli.st. My favourite registry is [www.sokindregsitry.org](http://www.sokindregsitry.org) and is run by the charitable organization Center for a New American Dream. This amazing registry allows you to register for a donation (say to a cause like supporting midwives in remote locations), for that organic mattress you've been wanting (but want a number of people to pitch in to help buy), and register for time: getting someone to come Tuesday to do laundry, Wednesday to make dinner, and Thursday to hold the baby so you can bathe.

## Don't Need!

**Things that are: big and plastic,** ugly and impossible to dispose of well, cheap and gimmicky (like most things with cartoon characters on them), or just designed to be useless after a year. These are among the many things you don't need to get from a baby shower.

**Wait and see before you buy strollers,** baby monitors, and tons of baby clothes. What you think you want of these items and what you end up using are very different! I know that the impulse to buy that beautiful, expensive (it's got a matching cup holder!) baby stroller is nearly overwhelming. However, for the first few months you will likely just want to keep your baby close in a sling. Then, you may just find you don't need a stroller at all because someone gave you a simple umbrella stroller and you love it. If you still want the fancy stroller down the line, by waiting until you're sure you can rest assured that it will not have been a waste of money.

You will be given lots and lots of things, including a million baby clothes, so ask for those items that you aren't likely to be given and are really sure you want.

## Do Need!

There are a few things that will make life so much easier and you will love having these things in your life: **Services such as a postpartum doula, food delivery, or just someone to wash the clothes** and fold the laundry (no one has ever regretted a little extra help).

**A really natural place to sleep:** either a formaldehyde-free crib with a natural mattress entirely free of polyurethane foam and all those nasty chemical flame retardants. Or, an all-wood co-sleeper or bassinet with the same kind of mattress but smaller. Or, just an organic wool puddle pad to put under the baby as she sleeps in your bed.

**Cloth diapers.** Pay for a service for the first three months when you will be changing the baby all the time. The service washes the diapers for you and takes them back when you are ready for bigger or different diapers. This is a great thing to register for!

**A cloth diaper trial.** There are dozens of sites in Canada where you can register for cloth diapers and for "trial packs" where you try different types of cloth diapers before you commit to one. Many shops offer in-store "how-to" demos, too.

**Baby slings and carriers.** A basic sling and a soft-sided carrier, such as an Ergo or Mei-tei style, are extremely useful tools for the modern parent.

**Sleep sack/swaddle.** There are all-cotton, organic swaddles with velcro. They are the best thing ever if you choose to swaddle – great for bleary-eyed parents! Sleep sacks are also a cosy and safe way for your little one to sleep.

**Some good books about natural parenting** can be a great help.

**Baby socks. Seriously.** At least 6 million in a variety of sizes, but that actually stay on. •



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