Diaper, Disposable Encyclopedia Article

Diaper, Disposable

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Diaper, Disposable

Before the advent of the disposable diaper in the 1960s, babies had to resign themselves to the discomfort of soggy cloth nappies, while their parents or nannies were saddled with the unpleasant tasks of washing, bleaching, and drying. Tired of diapers that had to be washed or sent to an expensive laundry service,New York homemaker Marion Donovan used some absorbent padding and a piece of shower curtain to invent the first disposable diaper, called *the Boater* , in 1951. Manufacturers were skeptical of the snap-on, throwaway diaper, so Donovan marketed her product herself. Her diaper grew more and more popular with both babies and adults and Donovan eventually sold her interest in the product for one million dollars. The first mass-produced disposable diapers were crude in construction; pulpy, uncomfortable,and often messy. Nevertheless, they were deemed superior to the cloth variety. By the late 1950s,Proctor and Gamble had begun research and development for a disposable diaper; it is said that P&G spent more research money on diapers than Henry Ford spent on the first automobile. The company's initial incarnation was a pair of plastic pants with an elasticized waistband and leg openings, but this product never gained much popularity.In 1961, Proctor and Gamble introduced Pampers, the rayon -plastic-fluff model that would set the standard and lead the market for diapers for the next several decades. By 1975, the company unveiled another brand called Luvs (designed by Kenneth Buell, whose resume included working on the Gemini space program). Improvements to the basic disposable diaper design have included adhesive tabs to replace the awkward and potentially dangerous diaper pin, and separate models specially designed to comfortably accommodate the anatomy of male and female infants. By the 1980s, most babies wore disposable diapers, despite a return to cloth diapers by some families concerned about the environmental implications of disposable diapers. Although manufacturers and devotees claim that disposable diapers comprise only a minute percentage of landfill waste,a number of babies again sport the cloth nappies their diaperers had earlier abandoned.