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Cribb Notes: Easing access to baby-stuff excess

[ROBERT CRIBB](#)

They say having kids changes your life.

There's the sleep deprivation, the sudden disappearance of any semblance of a social life, and having to quickly learn the seemingly indecipherable spoken language of babies.

But a lesser-known yet equally traumatic lifestyle change has to do with the "stuff factor" babies introduce.

The smallest person seems to require a stunning array of toys, puzzles, diapers, food, sanitized soothers, stuffed animals, jolly jumpers, bouncy chairs and blankets at all times. Taking a baby out of the house - even for a quick trip to the store - requires military-style logistical expertise.

And so, there has emerged an array of products aimed at the bewildered modern parent juggling the ever-growing mound of baby stuff.

The Baby Sherpa (\$89, <http://www.babysherpa.com>) has been all the talk around diaper change tables these days.

It looks like your run-of-the-mill backpack. But it was designed with the daunting requirements of parents in mind.

For example, it has a special chamber for diapers, a nicely tucked away diaper change pad, an insulated bottle holder, a pacifier clip and toy loops.

Then there are the food pockets.

If you think you get grouchy when you're hungry, you're an amateur compared to any hungry baby anywhere. The slightest twitch of a stomach rumble sends the typical infant into shrieking blasts of anxiety.

A handy cooler pocket in the Sherpa stores cold drinks and snacks - enough room for an afternoon's worth of juice boxes and sandwiches. And it actually does keep them reasonably cool.

There's also a separate, ingenious soft-sided bottle cooler compartment on the side that detaches from the bag for even more mobility.

I've only recently become aware of the serious stakes involved in having such items on hand at all times when you're on the road with a baby in tow.

When an infant in your care suddenly descends into ear-piercing wails in the middle of a grocery store, you quickly understand the essential need for handy diapers, toys and food. Fast access to such infant accessories represents the difference between calm-and-collected parental competence and hide-behind-the-peanut-butter-aisle shame.

Designers of the Baby Sherpa have also considered the non-essential items that seem to gradually emerge as essentials, such as the video camera.

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The average parent is unwilling to let even the most trivial moment of early childhood escape the family video camera lens, thus requiring the machine to be at the ready 24/7.

Instead of having to carry a separate video bag along with the cooler and diaper bag, the Baby Sherpa has a padded pocket to safely handle a video camera.

And it can double as a pocket for breast pumps (a phrase I'd lived a lifetime without hearing until only a few months ago).

Even with all of that stuff loaded up, there's still lots of room here for your adult stuff - wallets, keys and cell phones.

And a bungee cord running down the outside of the nicely designed pack lets you hang even more stuff - from shoes to blankets.

If it's a heavy load you're carrying a good distance, you can also use the waist belt and sternum strap for added support.

The bag is made of a strong, washable fabric and tough zippers, and weighs about 1.7 kilograms.

Obviously, you may be able to stuff most of this baby gear in any large, generic backpack.

But it's not going to work nearly as well.

There's a good bit of creative thinking here that stores far more than you'd think in the right way for parents - from the cooler pockets to the folded diaper change pad.

Sure, this seems like more of a luxury item than a parental necessity. And it is.

But if you do a lot of hiking around with your baby - on mountains or on city streets - the Baby Sherpa's advantages are meaningful.

It reduces as many as three bags into one. And it makes the almost unfathomable list of baby travel necessities a bit more manageable.

And that's no small feat.

A somewhat less successful example of baby-toting products is the WaterTot (\$70; <http://www.watertot.com>) - a baby carrier designed to help you introduce your infant to the water.

The idea here is to strap it onto your shoulders and slide your baby (weighing 3.6 kg to 13.5 kg) into the harness. You may well need help the first few times you do this. It sounds simple enough. But at first it seems to require a team of engineers.

The baby ends up sitting at chest height facing away from you - which means you can't see whether your child is inhaling water or smiling happily.

Eye contact with mom or dad is an instinctive need for parents introducing a baby to water. But that can't happen here.

While the WaterTot works as advertised, keeping baby firmly in place and freeing up your arms, it ultimately doesn't feel nearly as natural as simply holding your baby in the water face-to-face.

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