A second-hand pram, bundle of baby clothes or high chair can make a real difference to the cost of getting ready for a baby. But not every bargain is worth taking. With baby gear, the right question is not only "How much does it cost?" It is also "Is it safe, complete, cleanable and suitable for the way we'll use it?"

A sensible approach is to buy used where condition and history can be checked, and spend more carefully on items where hidden wear, missing parts or poor fit could affect safety. That can help with budget cuts without turning every purchase into a gamble.

This guide explains what is usually reasonable to buy second-hand, what is better bought new, and how to plan for the true cost. Safety standards and product advice can change, so check current guidance and the instructions for the exact item before using it.

Start with safety, not the price tag

Before buying any second-hand baby gear, find out the make, model and age. Ask for the manual, check that all parts are present, and look for damage, repairs or signs of heavy wear. Search the product name and model number on GOV.UK product safety and recall information. If you cannot establish what the item is, or how it has been used, walk away.

Check that the product is appropriate for your baby's age, size and stage. Follow the manufacturer's instructions, including any weight limits and rules about assembly. A low price is not a saving if you then need to buy missing adaptors, replace worn parts or discover the item does not fit your home or car.

- Ask the seller how old the item is, how it was stored and whether it has been involved in a crash or accident.
- Check for cracks, loose joints, sharp edges, frayed straps, mould, missing screws or unauthorised repairs.
- Confirm that the model has not been recalled and that replacement parts are available if needed.
- Clean it according to the manufacturer's instructions; do not use a product if you cannot make it hygienic.
- Be wary of listings that hide the model number, use unclear photos or offer a safety-critical item with no history.

Items that are often reasonable to buy second-hand

Clothes, blankets and washable soft goods

Baby clothes are among the easiest second-hand purchases. Babies grow quickly, and many outfits are worn only a handful of times. Check poppers, zips and seams, and look for stains, mould, loose buttons or damaged sleepwear fastenings. Wash items before use and follow the care label.

Blankets and washable accessories can also be good used buys if they are clean, in good condition and suitable for your baby's age. For sleep, follow current safer-sleep advice: do not put loose bedding, pillows or quilts in a baby's sleep space. Check current NHS or other official guidance if you are unsure what is appropriate.

Prams and pushchairs

A used pram or pushchair can be a worthwhile saving if you can inspect it in person. Test the brakes, wheels, folding mechanism, harness and recline. Check that the frame is not bent and that the seat unit, carrycot and any adaptors are the correct ones for the model. Ask whether the pushchair has been stored in a damp place and whether the fabric can be removed and cleaned.

Look up the manual and confirm the product is suitable for your baby's age and stage. A pushchair that looks fine in a photo may have worn brakes or a stiff folding lock. If you need to buy a new mattress, rain cover, car-seat adaptors or replacement parts, include those in the price comparison.

High chairs, changing tables and storage

Second-hand high chairs and changing tables may be suitable when they are stable, complete and easy to clean. Check straps and buckles, inspect the legs and joints, and make sure there toddleabout.co.uk are no cracks or loose parts. For a changing table, check the guard rails and follow instructions about safe use; never leave a baby unattended on it.

Drawers, baskets and nursery furniture can often be bought used too. Make sure furniture is stable and secure it to the wall where appropriate, following the manufacturer's guidance. Check for peeling paint, splinters and small detachable parts.



Toys, books and play mats

Books and simple toys are often sensible second-hand buys. Check for broken pieces, loose parts, damaged batteries or sharp edges, and make sure toys are age-appropriate. Soft toys should be washable and in good condition. Avoid anything with mould, a strong musty smell or a history you cannot establish.

Items that are usually better bought new

Cot mattress

A new mattress is a straightforward way to reduce uncertainty about cleanliness, fit and wear. It should fit the cot correctly, be firm and flat, and be used in line with the cot and mattress instructions. If considering a second-hand mattress, check the current safer-sleep advice and inspect it carefully; do not use one that is sagging, damaged, damp, stained or the wrong size.

Car seats

For most families, buying a new car seat is the safest and simplest choice because you can confirm its history, check the instructions and make sure it is suitable for your child and vehicle. A used seat may have been in a collision, may be missing parts, or may no longer have its instructions. Even a seat that looks undamaged could have hidden damage.

If you are considering a second-hand car seat, only do so when you know its full history, can identify the exact model, have all parts and instructions, and can verify that it has not been in a crash and is not subject to a recall. Check current GOV.UK rules and manufacturer guidance. Make sure the seat is compatible with your car and can be fitted correctly; a seat that does not fit properly is not a bargain.

Mattress protectors and items that contact milk or food

For hygiene and fit, buying new mattress protectors, bottle teats and replacement breast-pump parts that contact milk can be a sensible choice. Follow the product's cleaning and sterilising instructions. You may be able to buy the main pump second-hand, but check that it is designed for more than one user and replace the personal-use parts as recommended by its manufacturer.

Helmets and safety equipment

Do not buy a second-hand helmet unless you can be certain of its full history and that it meets current requirements. Impact damage may not be visible. For any safety equipment, including items with straps or protective functions, check current official guidance and the manufacturer's instructions before deciding.

Make the real cost visible

Second-hand prices can look attractively low, but the total cost may include delivery, cleaning supplies, replacement parts and accessories. A pram might need a new rain cover; a high chair may need a replacement harness; a used cot may not include the correct mattress. Keep a running list of sneaky extras such as meals, nappies, parking, uniforms and, for baby gear, adaptors, batteries and washable covers. They are easy to forget when you are comparing listings.

Item Second-hand price Likely extras What to check Pushchair £120 £25 rain cover, £15 adaptors, £10 cleaning supplies Brakes, harness, wheels, model and parts High chair £30 £12 replacement tray or straps Stability, joints, straps and cleaning Baby clothes bundle £25 £5 laundry costs Condition, fastenings and suitability

Use the table as a prompt rather than a promise about prices: costs vary by area, brand and condition. Compare the total with a new item's price, including any warranty or returns policy. If you cannot check a safety-critical item properly, put its cost in the budget as a new purchase rather than hoping for a lucky find.

Plan for the baby budget separately from emergencies

It helps to separate goal savings from emergency money. A **separate savings pot** for baby purchases can stop the cot, pram and first clothes from being muddled with money set aside for a boiler breakdown or a drop in income. An **instant-access savings account** can be useful for a goal you need to pay for soon, while keeping the money accessible.

Name and date the goal so it is specific. For example: "Baby essentials by 1 September". Then list the items you genuinely need, research their true total costs and add a contingency for price changes or missing essentials. If your list comes to £720 and you have six months, that is £120 a month. If the date is close, the monthly figure will be higher; knowing that early is more useful than hoping it will work out.

MoneyHelper offers guidance on budgeting and managing money. Money Trumpet may also help you explore practical saving approaches and ideas. Use any advice as a starting point, then check that your plan reflects your own bills, income and deadlines.

Keep your emergency fund separate from the baby goal. Set an emergency fund floor based on essential costs: housing, council tax, basic food, energy, essential travel, minimum debt payments and necessary childcare. The right floor depends on your household and income stability. Treat it as money for genuine urgent needs, not a way to make a planned purchase feel affordable.

For example, if essential housing costs are £1,200 a month, food and household basics are £400, and essential bills and travel are £500, those core costs are £2,100 a month. That is a useful starting point for thinking about an emergency fund floor; it is not a rule that every family must save the same amount. Your actual essentials may be higher or lower.

Run the plan through a bad month

Before committing to a shopping list, imagine a bad month: a boiler repair, fewer paid hours, or an unexpected travel cost. Can you still pay housing and essential bills without using the baby savings or going into expensive debt? If not, reduce or delay non-essential purchases, look for verified second-hand options, or revisit the timeline. Do not solve a shortfall by quietly spending the emergency fund.

It can also help to prioritise purchases by when you need them. You may not need every outfit, toy or nursery accessory before the birth. Buy the essentials first, then add items as you learn what works for your family. Ask friends and relatives for specific practical help, such as a particular size of clothing or a meal, rather than accepting a pile of items you cannot use.

A quick decision checklist

1. **Identify the item:** find the make, model, age and instructions.
2. **Check safety:** search for recalls and inspect for damage, missing parts and wear.
3. **Check fit:** confirm it suits your baby, home or vehicle and meets current guidance.
4. **Work out the total:** add delivery, cleaning, replacement parts and accessories.
5. **Protect your savings:** keep the baby goal in its own pot and preserve your emergency fund floor.
6. **Test a bad month:** make sure the plan still leaves essential costs covered.

In short, second-hand baby gear can be a smart way to manage costs when you can verify its history, condition and completeness. Clothes, books, many toys, furniture and some pushchairs can be good candidates. For items where fit, hygiene or hidden damage matters more—especially car seats and sleep equipment—be more cautious and consider buying new. A clear list, a separate savings pot and a realistic contingency can help you save money without making safety an afterthought.


SAVINGS