

UK NHS hospital bag checklist

Everything the NHS list misses. Nothing you won't need

From the founder

I had my children at the Royal Berkshire Hospital in 2005 and 2007 — one vaginal birth and one emergency C-section. Both times, I arrived at the ward with things I didn't need and without things I desperately did. I made this checklist so you don't have to learn the hard way. Everything here comes from real experience on an NHS ward — not a generic template.

Cross-checked against NHS guidelines · NCT · Tommy's · Royal College of Midwives

Most NHS trusts ask you to have your bag ready from 36 weeks. If you're between 28 and 34 weeks, now is the time.

What's inside list:

- Labour essentials — what to have to hand the moment you arrive
- After baby arrives — postnatal recovery + newborn items
- Birth partner's bag — so they're prepared too
- C-section edition — what changes if your birth goes differently
- What the NHS list gets wrong — and what it leaves out entirely

A4 printable

On-line form

Planning ahead

Add everything to your Amazon Baby Wishlist so friends and family can buy the items you need



What the NHS checklist doesn't tell you

The NHS hospital bag list is a starting point. It tells you to pack a nightgown and a going-home outfit. It does not tell you any of the following.



The NHS will not give you maternity pads

They expect you to bring your own. Pack at least two full packs (10–12 pads per pack). Regular sanitary towels are not suitable.

Your bump will not have gone down when you go home

Pack maternity clothes for the return journey, not your pre-pregnancy wardrobe.

The ward will be warm, not comfortable

NHS postnatal wards are hot. A light, loose nightgown is more practical than pyjamas. You will also want a fan if it is summer.

Your birth partner cannot eat hospital food

Catering is for patients only. If your partner will be there for 12+ hours, they need their own food. The canteen may not be open at 3am.

Your phone will die at the worst moment

A long charging cable (2m+) and a power bank are not optional. NHS ward sockets are rarely next to the bed.

Skin-to-skin requires nothing but bare skin

Do not pack a special outfit for your first hour. You will be skin-to-skin. The outfit goes on afterwards.

The TENS machine must be hired before 37 weeks

See page 6 for what to add, what to remove, and what the standard list assumes that doesn't apply to you.

Want personalised recommendations based on your due date and birth settings?
Get your free MumReady plan at mumready.co.uk

SMP Calculator

Know exactly what you'll be paid

Free at mumready.co.uk

Budget Planner

Plan your maternity finances

Free with email

Birth Plan

A template midwives recognise

Etsy £3.49

Leave Countdown

Your milestone dates at a glance

Free at mumready.co.uk



Your bag — labour essentials

Pack these for the moment you arrive. Keep the labour section at the top of your bag or in a separate small bag.

Pack these at the top — you'll need them the moment you arrive

- MATB1 form + NHS maternity notes folder
- Birth plan (printed, 2 copies)
- Your ID and any relevant medical letters
- Phone + long charger + power bank

Labour

- Nightgown or loose T-shirt for labour

something you don't mind ruining

- Dressing gown

For walking the ward and staying warm

- Supportive slippers or flip-flops

not bare feet on ward floors

- Lip balm

gas and air dries lips severely

- Hair ties / clips

3 or 4, you will lose them

- Water bottle with a straw lid

easier to drink during contractions

- Snacks for labour

high-calorie, easy to eat

mumready.co.uk/go/labour-snacks

- Snacks for birth partner

substantial food for a full day

- TENS machine

hire in advance, bring fully charged [mumready.co.uk/go/tens]

[TENS machines — the ones UK midwives recommend](#)

- Swimwear

if planning birth pool

- Massage oil or lotion

for back pain and partner massage

- Headphones + music

podcast playlist downloaded

- Small pillow from home

NHS pillows are often flat

MATB1 and NHS notest label

[Do not put these at the bottom of your bag. The midwife will ask for them within minutes of arrival. Keep them in your hand or top pocket.]



After baby arrives — postnatal + baby items

Once baby is here, you move to the postnatal ward.

This section covers what you'll need for recovery and for your baby's first hours.

Postnatal — for you

- Maternity pads**
2 full packs (not sanitary towels — these are not thick enough) mumready.co.uk/go/maternity-pads
- Disposable knickers**
1 pack of 10 minimum
- Comfortable nursing bra or soft bra**
mumready.co.uk/go/nursing-bra
- Nipple cream**
Lansinoh is the NHS midwife recommendation
- Breast pads**
1 pack
- Toiletries: shower gel, shampoo, toothbrush, deodorant**
pack travel sizes — ward space is limited and you may not be there long
- Towel**
NHS may provide one but bring your own
- Dry shampoo**
a shower may not be possible for 24–48 hours after birth — dry shampoo is not optional
- Loose comfortable nightwear for postnatal ward**
you will be in this for longer than you expect — bring two sets
- Snacks for recovery — Dried fruit**
you'll be very hungry—prunes or apricots (NCT recommends it. Constipation after birth is very common.)
- Comfortable going-home outfit**
your bump will not have gone down — pack maternity clothes

Storage tip

Pack your postnatal items in a separate bag or large zip pouch inside your main bag. When you move to the postnatal ward, you want to be able to grab this section without unpacking everything.

Baby items

- Vests + sleepsuits**
3 of each (pack newborn AND 0–3 month sizes — babies vary enormously)
- Hat**
scratch mittens · socks
- Nappies, cotton wool & muslin squares (3–4)**
1 pack (newborn nappies)
- Comfortable going-home outfit**
accessible at the top



Birth partner + going home

Your birth partner needs their own bag. They may be at hospital for 12–48 hours and cannot rely on the ward for anything.

Birth partner's bag

- Change of clothes + toiletries
- Phone + long charger + power bank
they'll be timing contractions and taking photos all day – battery matters
- Substantial food for a full day
hospital canteen may not be open at 3am
- Cash + coins
car park + vending
- Swimwear
if planning birth pool
- List of people to call
written on paper (not just in their phone – phones die)

Partner visiting hours

On most NHS postnatal wards, partners cannot stay overnight. Check your trust's policy before the day.

Going home

- Car seat
fitted + tested before the birth (must be in the car already. Do not bring onto the ward.) mum-ready.co.uk/baby-transport
- Loose going-home outfit
bump is still there, pack maternity clothes
- Going-home outfit for baby
top of bag
- Snowsuit if weather is cold

The first night home

Before going in, prepare a bedside table: maternity pads, water, snacks, charger. At 3am you won't be able to search.



C-section edition

From personal experience

My second birth was an emergency C-section. I was completely unprepared for the practicalities — high-waisted knickers, the difficulty getting out of bed, the six-week lifting restriction. This is everything I'd pack differently.

Additional C-section items

- High-waisted knickers
essential, not optional (must sit above the incision. Buy a size up.)
- Loose, high-waisted bottoms for going home
nothing that sits on the scar
- Extra maternity pads
bleeding can be heavier after a section
- Peppermint tea bags
trapped wind after a C-section is extremely painful. Peppermint helps.
- Comfortable nightgown rather than pyjama bottoms
waistbands on the incision are very uncomfortable
- Pillow for the car journey home
hold it against your abdomen over the seatbelt. Essential.

What to remove from the standard list

TENS machine — not applicable for planned or emergency sections under spinal

Birth pool / swimwear — not applicable

Midwife's specific notes

My consultant's instructions

If you're having or have had a C-section, our return-to-work planner includes a maternity leave timeline built for surgical recovery. mumready.co.uk/return-to-work



SMP Calculator

Budget Planner

Birth Plan

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