

# Finland's maternity package

– an equal  
start to life



MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN  
AFFAIRS OF FINLAND

**Every Finnish mother receives a maternity grant when a baby is born. Mothers can choose between a cash grant or a maternity package containing good quality clothing and baby-care products. Of the 60,000 maternity grants distributed annually by the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, two-thirds are taken as maternity packages.**

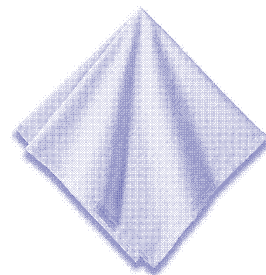
**The package was designed in 1937 to give all children a more equal start to life, and it continues to serve this purpose. Finland's child mortality rate is among the lowest in the world, partly thanks to the maternity grant and associated health checks.**

# 1938

Finland's new Maternity Grants Act came into force on 1 January. About two-thirds of the country's new mothers received maternity grants that amounted to more than a third of the average monthly salary of an industrial worker. The box containing the maternity package could itself be used as a safe bed for the baby. In those days the poorest homes did not necessarily have a clean place for a baby to sleep.

# 1930s- 1940s

Since clothes were still largely home-made, early maternity packages contained fabric suitable for baby clothes. They also contained the muslin squares that still feature in packages today.



# 1939- 1944

## The war years

During the 1940s textiles were in short supply. From 1940 all flannel, plain-weave cotton and bedsheet fabric was officially reserved for the Defence Forces, though some fabrics still found their way into maternity packages until early 1941. Shortages of materials then became worse, though the government still tried to continue providing packages, especially since many people in Finland had lost their homes due to bombings and evacuations.

# 1949

Eligibility for maternity grants no longer depended on a family's income, and was extended to all mothers residing in Finland. Under a new provision mothers wishing to receive grants now had to visit a physician, midwife or municipal pre-natal clinic before the end of the fourth month of pregnancy. This effectively encouraged pregnant mothers to have health checks, helping to put Finland among the countries with the world's lowest maternity and child mortality rates.

# 1950s

From 1942 until 1946 maternity packages contained many products made of paper, such as bedsheets for mothers and specially designed paper swaddling clothes.

The quantity and quality of the clothes provided in the package increased gradually. Initially clothes were made of white or unbleached cotton. Mothers would often embroider them for a more personalized appearance. From 1957 fabrics and sewing materials were replaced by ready-made garments.



**Maternity pack contents**  
**(details vary annually)**

Mattress, mattress cover,  
undersheet, blanket, duvet cover  
Snowsuit / sleeping bag  
Sleeping bag / quilt  
Different types of hats  
Tights, socks and mittens  
Light quilted suit  
Wool-mix suit  
Body suits  
Romper suit  
Leggings  
Baby bath kit  
Reusable nappies  
Sanitary towels  
Nipple cream  
Condoms  
Bra pads

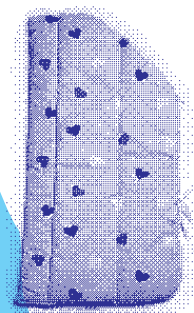
## 1960s – 1970s

During this period of transformation in Finnish society many people moved from rural areas to new urban homes. Consequent changes in lifestyle, consumption patterns and consumer products were reflected in the items found in maternity packages. In the 1970s all non-stretch clothes were replaced by practical stretch cotton and terry items such as romper suits and wrap tops, because working mothers needed ready-made, easy-to-use products for their babies. White clothes meanwhile gave way to more colourful items. Since washing machines were now more common, packages no longer contained protective collars designed to keep underlying garments clean.



## 1968

Sleeping bags first appeared in maternity packages instead of quilts. The design of these sleeping bags has changed from year to year.

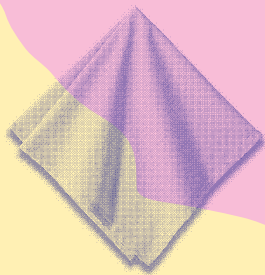


## 1980s – 1990s

The need for maternity packages was questioned in the 1980s as families became better off, but since the packages remained as popular as ever among new parents it was decided to continue offering them. Packages now included products to help with other aspects of child-rearing, such as a picture book to encourage parents to interact with their babies. From 1990 packages also contained bodysuits.



# 2000s



Decisions on the contents of maternity packages are made annually by a social insurance committee following competitive tendering processes involving product suppliers. The selection criteria for items include the needs of babies and parents, gender neutrality in colour schemes, quality, and affordability.

Ecological considerations have gradually become more important. Cloth nappies were included in packages from 2006, and disposable nappies were left out in 2009. This decision reduced the number of disposable nappies ending up in landfill sites by 700,000 a year. Among all of these gradual changes, the packages' multipurpose muslin squares have remained basically the same since the early days.

The box containing the maternity package was redesigned in 2015 through a competition for design students.