

Top tip for post-christmas stuff detox

I also discovered just how much *stuff* a baby is given for Christmas, especially clothes. The problem with being given clothes is that you rarely end up with the right size for the right season that actually fits at the right time. I forever have a sack of beautiful things that will never fit Emie, and so by January I'm drowning in broderie anglaise and mini denim jackets. I do give a lot to charity shops, but when you're also trying to factor in buying the next lot of clothing, TooBigForThat.com is a total saviour. An online clothes store, they will arrange collection of your unwanted items, sell the nicer, unworn children's clothing and give you a cut of the profit, either in cash or in credit to use on their site. It's actually a great place to buy gifts too, as a discounted rate from the high street prices. TooBigForThat.com

Product of the Month

Eeboo's Tot Towers

You will also most likely find yourself overwhelmed with bits of motorised plastic by Fisher Price et al, until it's tumbling out of cupboards, careering down hallways and knocking you off your feet. And yet amongst all the noisy, fit-inducing mechanised stuff, my baby gravitated to the simplest of toys: stacking boxes. Cue an influx of jokes about her future career. But your friends won't hate you if you choose these over the flashy-looking fire engine with matching megaphone. The very beautiful Eeboo's Tot Towers are 100 per cent non-toxic and made from recycled material - apparently best for ages 2+ but Emie's been playing with hers since she was six months old.



Mother & baby

Grace Timothy on swapping her Manolos for motherhood

Santa baby...



Long before I had a child of my own, I realised Christmas was really all about the kids. Once I'd reached the point where I looked forward to the Champagne and mince pies more than presents, carol-singing and Santa Claus' permissible form of breaking-and-entering, I knew it would be 'just another day off' until the time came for me to start all those traditions again for my own family.

Tradition means a lot to me, but coming from a non-Christian family, some of ours are slightly alternative. My father is always sent out early on Christmas Eve to buy Brussels sprouts. This year, I dutifully set out in the dark to do the same, though unable to explain why to my bleary-eyed husband, except that I was up nursing a three-month old baby anyway. I parked in the mother-and-baby space right in front of the doors - thank you, Waitrose - and in I went, Emie asleep in a sling, head lolling around like a bladder on a stick - a serious affront to my attempt at creating memorable traditions for her.

Having a baby does not get you priority over the sprouts though, and I was almost knocked for six by a frail-looking but actually rather boisterous elderly man with a stick. I went home feeling very cranky. Soldiering on, I spent the rest of the day making Christmas Pie - a huge bake filled

with turkey, cranberries, walnuts, sausage meat, stuffing and ham - which Emie slept through again, occasionally lifting one lid to see why the smoke alarm was going off. It was absolutely vile, as were the burnt sprouts I'd fought tooth and nail for - Jamie Oliver's recipe gone awry - and the glass of alcohol-free wine I'd bought especially.

Emie continued to sleep through the day, and then roused for nearly the entire night, staring at us every time 'Santa' tried to hang her stocking. I was exhausted, hungry and disappointed that my plans for my first Christmas as a mother were dashed. At 6am on Christmas morning, I gave in, cried and snacked on a turkey breast - not far off previous childless Christmas mornings, but without the excuse of a hangover.

Once I'd stopped trying to be Martha Stewart and settled for a guileless Grinch I had a really lovely day. Emie ignored her presents but loved watching us trying to right the toppling Christmas tree. I slept through all the family games and *It's A Wonderful Life* but loved watching Emie curled up on her father's chest in front of the fire. Nobody ate my Christmas Pie, but heartily enjoyed three tins of Quality Street and a Toblerone. All in all, I look forward to doing it all again this Christmas, as the real moments of joy come when you're too knackered to do anything else. ■