

# Milk Bag Project

## Info Sheet

### FAQ

1. **How many bags does it take to make one mat?**

That depends on how wide you cut the strips and how tight you crochet the mat. It can take from 300-500 bags to make one adult mat.

2. **Can you use other kinds of bags?**

Experience has shown that the outer printed milk bags are the best for making sleeping mats. The plastic in them is durable and repels bugs while still being somewhat soft for sleeping on. Some companies are now using bio-degradable outer bags which are **not** suitable for these sleeping mats since they will not stand up to use.

3. **When the mats are worn out, where will they end up? Won't the mats just end up in another country's landfill, or worse, add to the growing soup of garbage in the ocean?**

First of all, the plastic milk bags we are using already exist and must be disposed of somehow. Some municipalities here are able to recycle them, but in many areas they just end up in landfill and many of those do find their way into the oceans causing serious environmental problems. Using these existing bags for sleeping mats helps to keep them out of landfills and out of the oceans. Re-using is always preferable to recycling. These mats are also quite durable so it will be many years before they are 'worn out'. If they were disposed of after wearing out, they could be recycled in their target country if facilities exist (and if they don't now, they may by the time the mat wears out). Even without recycling facilities, it is most likely that the people using them will find other ways to re-use the plastic rather than simply throw them out since every resource is precious when you have very little. Also keep in mind that until the mats wear out, they are being used as beds for people who would otherwise be sleeping on the ground. The mattresses we use here in North America cannot be recycled and take up far more room in a landfill than these mats.

4. **Could the crocheting become loose enough for a child to choke on the mats?**

The crocheting is quite tight and even if stretched, you could only put a finger or two through. There is no risk of a child being choked by these mats.

5. **Can I mail you the bags I've collected?**

Most of the time, we are glad to get more bags (although sometimes we get far more than we can keep up with). However, if you're not close enough to drop off the bags, it

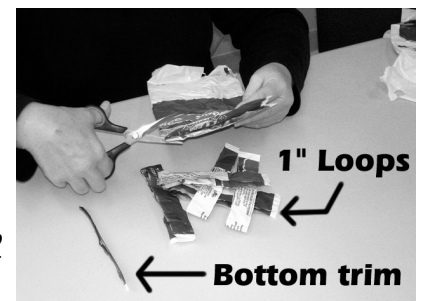
can be quite expensive to try to mail them (even though they are light, they are bulky). If you're not close by, try to start your own Milk Bag Group. If you don't crochet (although it's not hard to learn how), you could do the cutting and looping for someone who does.

# Instructions

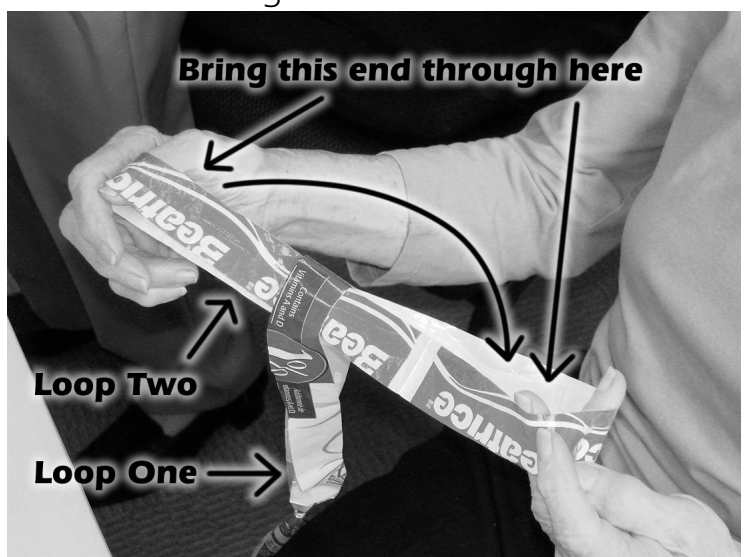
Thank you so much for your interest in the Milk Bag Project! We hope this information will help you to get your own Milk Bag Project started where you are. If you are starting a group, you can have some people working on cutting, others on looping and others on crocheting so that those who don't know how to crochet can still get involved. Having your group meet to work on the mats together at least once a month makes the work much more fun and helps those who are new to the project to learn from the more experienced members.

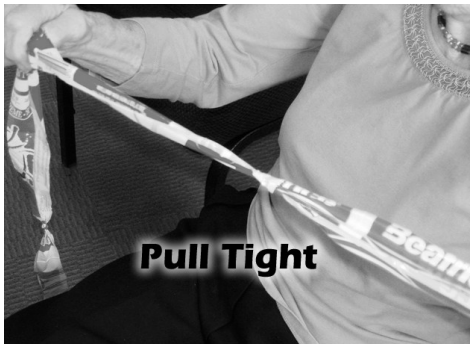
1. **Before you start** collecting the bags, you should find an agency that can take the completed mats. Ideally, you should find one that is close enough for you to deliver the mats yourself. These mats are used in Haiti and in Africa, so relief agencies that send goods to those areas are ideal. You can also check with local churches to see if their denomination does relief work in those areas and may be interested in making use of these mats.
2. **Milk Bag Preparation:** Make sure to rinse and thoroughly dry the outer, printed bags before folding them and remove any bag clips. This helps to reduce mildew growing on any stray drops of milk. Often, simply wiping out the bags is sufficient and reduces the problems in trying to thoroughly dry out the bags.

3. **Cutting:** Smooth out the milk bag and fold two or three times length-wise. Trim a few millimeters off the bottom of the bag so that it is now open on the bottom and the top. Starting at the bottom, cut width-wise approximately every 1-1/2 inches. Stop cutting once you reach the crinkled-up part where the tag used to be. You can discard to the top of the bag from the crinkle up. You should now have several loops about 1-1/4 to 1-1/2 inches wide.



4. **Looping:** To create the "yarn", you will need to loop the bag pieces together. Open loop number one and pass about an inch of loop number two through the opening near one end. Then, open the short end of loop two and pass the long end through and pull tight (the plastic is strong and tighter knots will make





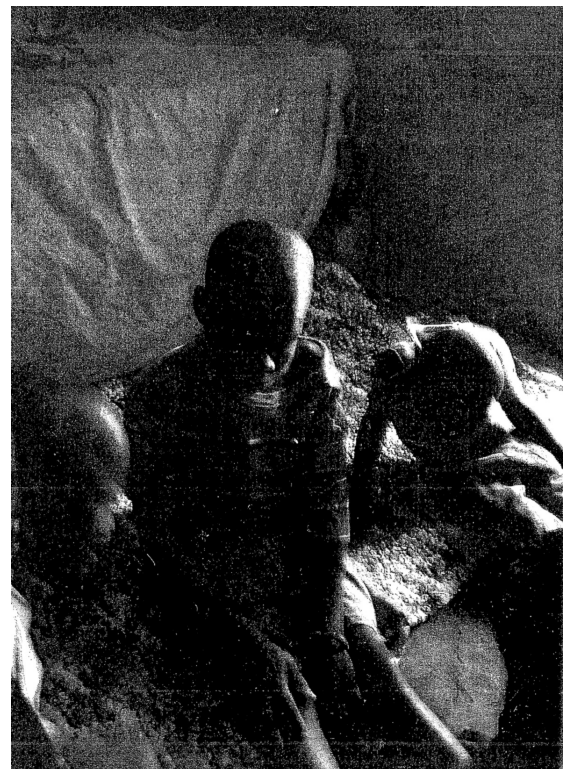
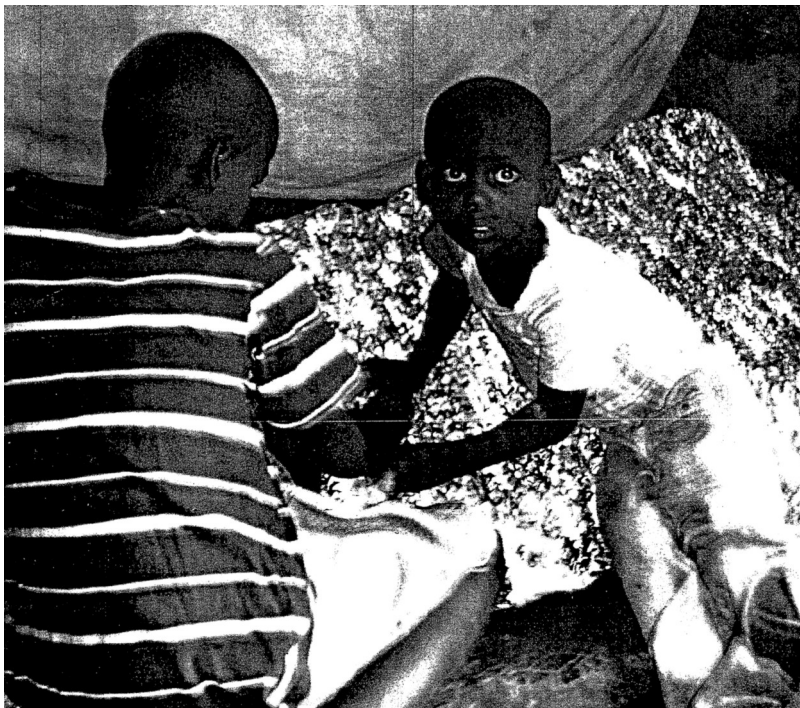
crocheting easier). Repeat until you start to get a length of 'yarn'. Start rolling the 'yarn' into a ball and stop looping once the ball is about the size of a grapefruit. Any bigger than this will make the crocheting difficult. You can continue by making more balls.



- Crocheting:** You will need a 7mm crochet hook (or adjust based on how you crochet) and a measuring tape. The recommended size for a child's mat is 36" x 48". The recommended size for an adult's mat is 36" x 65". Take your crochet hook and put in the end of a loop of yarn. Twist the plastic around so that you can make a loop and then put the hook under your row of one inch plastic and grab both layers of the plastic and pull through. Now chain 36 inches across and then 2 more stitches to turn. On the next row, start crocheting at the second stitch in. Continue back and forth with two extra stitches on each end to keep the edges of the mat flat.

If you have never crocheted before, it would probably be a good idea to borrow a beginner's book on crocheting from your local library and try out some basic projects with regular yarn before attempting these mats. These mats are not difficult to make since they just use one basic crochet stitch, but it may take a bit of practice to work with the plastic so a little bit of experience with regular yarn is often found to be helpful.

Here are some pictures of children in Haiti with their new sleeping mats ...



Feel free to contact us for more information:

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