

GUIDE TO BABYWEARING

BENEFITS OF BABYWEARING

Ten Reasons to Wear your Baby, by Laura Simeon, MA, MLIS : http://www.naturalchild.org/guest/laura_simeon.html

1. **Wearing a baby is convenient.** When we carry a baby in a sling, we can walk around freely and not have to worry about negotiating steps, crowds or narrow aisles with a stroller. Plastic "baby buckets" and removable car seats are heavy and awkward for parents, babies often look uncomfortable, and they are kept at knee level. A sling can block out excess stimuli when breastfeeding a distractible baby, and it allows for discreet nursing in public places. A sling can also double as a changing pad, blanket, or cushion when away from home. I've found my sling especially handy when negotiating busy airports with a small child and several bags!

2. **Wearing a baby promotes physical development.** When a baby rides in a sling attached to his mother, he is in tune with the rhythm of her breathing, the sound of her heartbeat, and the movements his mother makes – walking, bending, and reaching. This stimulation helps him to regulate his own physical responses, and exercises his vestibular system, which controls balance. The sling is in essence a "transitional womb" for the new baby, who has not yet learned to control his bodily functions and movements. Research has shown that premature babies who are touched and held gain weight faster and are healthier than babies who are not¹. Mechanical swings and other holding devices do not provide these same benefits.

3. **Babies worn in slings are happier.** Studies have shown that the more babies are held, the less they cry and fuss². In indigenous cultures where baby-wearing is the norm, babies often cry for only a few minutes a day – in contrast to Western babies, who often cry for hours each day. Crying is exhausting for both the baby and his parents, and may cause long-term damage as the baby's developing brain is continually flooded with stress hormones.³ Babies who do not need to spend their energy on crying are calmly observing and actively learning about their environment. Baby-wearing is especially useful for colicky babies, who are far happier being worn, but placid, content babies and children will also benefit greatly from the warmth and security of being held close.

4. **Baby-wearing is healthy for you!** It can be challenging for new mothers to find time to exercise, but if you carry your baby around with you most of the day or go for a brisk walk with your baby in her sling, you will enjoy the dual benefits of walking and "weightlifting". A long walk in the sling is also an excellent way to help a tired but over-stimulated child fall asleep.

5. **Toddlers appreciate the security of the sling.** Slings are usually associated with infants, but they can be very useful for toddlers as well; most slings accommodate children up to 35 or 40 pounds. The world can be a scary place for toddlers, who feel more confident when they can retreat to the security of the sling when they need to do so. Toddlers often become over-stimulated, and a ride in the sling helps to soothe and comfort them before (or after!) a "melt-down" occurs. It can be very helpful in places like the zoo, aquarium, or museum, where a small child in a stroller would miss many of the exhibits.

6. Baby-wearing helps you and your baby to communicate with each other. The more confidence we have in our parenting, the more we can relax and enjoy our children. A large part of feeling confident as a parent is the ability to read our baby's cues successfully. When we hold our baby close in a sling, we become finely attuned to his gestures and facial expressions. Many baby-wearing parents report that they have never learned to distinguish their baby's cries – because their babies are able to communicate effectively without crying! Every time a baby is able to let us know that she is hungry, bored or wet without having to cry, her trust in us is increased, her learning is enhanced, and our own confidence is reinforced. This cycle of positive interaction enhances the mutual attachment between parent and child, and makes life more enjoyable for everyone.

7. Slings are a bonding tool for fathers, grandparents, and other caregivers. Slings are a useful tool for every adult in a baby's life. It makes me smile when I see a new father going for a walk with his baby in a sling. The baby is becoming used to his voice, heartbeat, movements and facial expressions, and the two are forging a strong attachment of their own. Fathers don't have the automatic head-start on bonding that comes with gestation, but that doesn't mean they can't make up for this once their baby is born. The same goes for babysitters, grandparents and all other caregivers. Cuddling up close in the sling is a wonderful way to get to know the baby in your life, and for the baby to get to know you!

8. Slings are a safe place for a child to be. Instead of running loose in crowded or dangerous places, a child in a sling is held safe and secure right next to your body. Slings also provide emotional safety when needed, so that children can venture into the world and become independent at their own pace.

9. Slings are economical. Slings cost far less than strollers, front-carriers or backpacks. Many mothers consider the sling to be one of their most useful and economical possessions. Inexpensive used slings can be found in consignment and thrift stores, and new ones can be bought for about \$25 - \$50 (U.S.) - not bad for an item many parents use daily for two years or more! A sling can also be sewn for the price of a length of cotton, some rings and batting; sling patterns are available.

10. Baby-wearing is fun. Who doesn't love to cuddle a precious little baby? And when your baby is older, having her in the sling makes conversations easier and allows you to observe her reactions to the wonders of the world around her. It's also fun for baby, because when she is up at eye level, other adults notice and interact with her more. Your child will feel more a part of your life when she is in her sling, and you will find yourself becoming more and more enchanted with this special little person.

BABYWEARING SAFETY

Excellent information courtesy of Earthy Crunchy Mama:

<http://www.earthycrunchymama.com/2013/04/tips-for-babywearing-safety/>

Safety is so very important while you are wearing your baby – no matter what type of carrier you choose or what carry you are doing. Your baby's safety is of the utmost importance. Before you even put your baby in a carrier keep these things in mind:

- **Make sure your carrier is in good working condition before use** – This is especially important if you are using a carrier you got second hand or are borrowing one. Regardless, always check your carrier for rips, broken buckles, undone seams, etc. **NEVER** use a carrier that's damaged or that's been recalled (like bag slings).
- **Follow your carriers instructions** – All carriers come with instructions. If you're missing yours – check online. You'll be able to see what carries you can do and how to do them properly. You'll also want to take note of the age and weight limits on your carrier.
- **Master basic carries before you attempt more advanced ones** – if you've never put your baby on your back, then don't attempt that carry before you've mastered carrying your baby on your front. Work up to the harder stuff.
- **Practice with a partner/friend** – They can help you keep your baby secure while you get used to the carrier. If you are by yourself, you can practice over a bed, couch, or while sitting on the floor. This tip is especially useful when you are first learning how to get your baby on your back.

Once you have your baby in a carrier, it's important to pay special attention to them. It's not a "set and forget" type of thing. Here are some things you should be aware of while wearing your baby.

- **Your baby should be able to breathe** – Their airway should be clear and unobstructed. Their chin should never be pressed down to their chest, as this can cause suffocation. Fabric should not be covering your baby's face. Grunting noises are a sign that your baby is not breathing well. If you hear these sounds, reposition your baby in the carrier immediately.
- **Your baby should be supported** – A carrier is designed to keep your baby close to you. It should be tight and your baby should be right up against you. Your baby shouldn't be slumped down in the carrier, as this can cause your baby to have difficulty breathing. Until your baby has head and neck control, you'll also want to make sure that the carrier is supporting their head properly.
- **Your baby should be kissable** – Your baby needs to be positioned in the carrier so that you can easily kiss the top of their head – with the exception of back carries.
- **Your baby should be supported from knee to knee with their knees higher than their butt** – Except in cradle carries, your baby's legs need to be supported fully by the carrier for proper hip alignment. We'll talk more about this and "crotch dangler" carriers in a separate post.
- **You should only do activities that you would do if you were carrying your child in your arms** – Jumping, running, riding a bike, swimming under water, driving in a car, riding an ATV, etc., are all off limits while babywearing. Use your common sense.
- **Your baby shouldn't be too hot or too cold** – Pay attention to the weather and dress you and your baby accordingly. If it's hot, dress your baby in thin layers and use sunscreen on exposed skin. If it's cold, wear multiple layers. You can even purchase special babywearing jackets/coats. Also, make sure the carrier itself isn't too hot. Some carriers are made to be used in hot weather and are made with breathable fabric.

The T.I.C.K.S. Rule for Safe Babywearing

Keep your baby close and keep your baby safe.

When you're wearing a sling or carrier, don't forget the T.I.C.K.S.



- ✓ **TIGHT**
- ✓ **IN VIEW AT ALL TIMES**
- ✓ **CLOSE ENOUGH TO KISS**
- ✓ **KEEP CHIN OFF THE CHEST**
- ✓ **SUPPORTED BACK**



TIGHT – slings and carriers should be tight enough to hug your baby close to you as this will be most comfortable for you both. Any slack/loose fabric will allow your baby to slump down in the carrier which can hinder their breathing and pull on your back.



IN VIEW AT ALL TIMES – you should always be able to see your baby's face by simply glancing down. The fabric of a sling or carrier should not close around them so you have to open it to check on them. In a cradle position your baby should face upwards not be turned in towards your body.



CLOSE ENOUGH TO KISS – your baby's head should be as close to your chin as is comfortable. By tipping your head forward you should be able to kiss your baby on the head or forehead.



KEEP CHIN OFF THE CHEST – a baby should never be curled so their chin is forced onto their chest as this can restrict their breathing. Ensure there is always a space of at least a finger width under your baby's chin.



SUPPORTED BACK – in an upright carry a baby should be held comfortably close to the wearer so their back is supported in its natural position and their tummy and chest are against you. If a sling is too loose they can slump which can partially close their airway. (This can be tested by placing a hand on your baby's back and pressing gently – they should not uncurl or move closer to you.) A baby in a cradle carry in a pouch or ring sling should be positioned carefully with their bottom in the deepest part so the sling does not fold them in half pressing their chin to their chest.

Image courtesy of The Consortium of UK Sling Retailers and Manufacturers

WRAPS – STRETCHY & WOVEN

Stretchy:

- A single, very long piece of stretchy, 100% cotton knit fabric.
- Manufacturers suggest use through 35 lbs, though most people transition to non-stretchy carriers around 20 lbs.
- Can only be used in front carrying positions. BACK CARRIES ARE NOT SAFE WITH STRETCHY WRAPS.

Common brands (stretchy): Boba, Moby, Solly Baby, K'tan (also a stretchy carrier, not a wrap)

Woven:

- A single piece of machine or handwoven fabric, often cotton or cotton blend, length varies.
- Supportive and versatile, require some skill for use.
- Front, side and back carries are all possible. There are many modifications and variations to carries.
- 100% cotton, 100% linen, blends: cotton, linen, hemp, wool, silk
- Age range: newborn through toddler and beyond

Woven Wrap Sizing:

- Size 1 – 2.2 meters (also referred to as a rebozo length or shorty)
- Size 2 – 2.7 meters (also referred to as a rebozo length or shorty)
- Size 3 – 3.2 meters (also referred to as a long shorty)
- Size 4 – 3.7 meters
- Size 5 – 4.2 meters
- Size 6 – 4.7 meters (common beginner size, "standard")
- Size 7 – 5.2 meters

Common brands (woven): BB Slen, Didymos, Diva Milano, Dolcino, Ellaroo, Ellevill, Girasol, Hoppediz, KoKaDi, Lenny Lamb, Little Frog, Natibaby, Oscha, Pavo, Storchenweige, Tehkni, Vatanai

ADD PICTURE Jess Reagan - 035.JPD 5/31/2012

MEI TAIS

- Pronounced “may ties”, this is a popular Asian style carrier.
- Very basic design consisting of a square or rectangular piece of fabric with 4 straps.
- Work similarly to SSCs, but have tied straps vs. buckles.
- Can be worn on the front, hip and back.
- Similar carriers: Onbu and Podaegi, both have only two straps vs. four, but work similarly to mei tais
- Age range: newborn through toddler

Common brands: Baby Hawk, Bamberoo, Catbird Baby, Kozy Carrier, Infantino

ADD PICTURE Lauren Coleman - Mommy-and-Me-2014-0050.jpg 5/18/2014

RING SLINGS

- A single piece of fabric with a hemmed shoulder and two rings, worn on either shoulder.
- Shoulder types and lengths vary.
- Made from a wide range of non-stretchy material.
- Thin fabrics are not supportive for heavier toddlers.
- Mainly used for front and hip carries, quick back carries are possible for experienced users.
- Age range: newborn through toddler

Common brands: Maya Wrap, Sakura Bloom, Sleeping Baby Productions

ADD PICTURE Erica Wolfe - Mommy-and-Me-2014-0146.jpg 5/18/2014

SOFT-STRUCTURED CARRIERS –

- Sometimes called “backpack carriers”, this type has padded straps and buckles.
- Can be worn on the front and back, some models on the hip.
- Look for carriers with a wide base to support your baby’s bottom.
- Easy to get on and position.
- While men can use all baby carriers, many seem to prefer this style.
- Best for babies with good head control, some models offer an extra insert for infants.
- Age range: newborn (with insert) through toddler

Common brands: Angelpack, Beco, Boba, Ergo, Kinderpack, Lillebaby, Moby, Onya, Tula

ADD PICTURE Abigail Waples - Mommy-and-Me-2014-0034.jpg 5/18/2014

WRAP CONVERSIONS

- Wrap conversion carriers are styles that have been created with woven wraps.
- Very customizable, but can be very expensive.
- Can be used with newborns through toddlers depending on the carrier sizing – some are very adjustable; some are only made to fit specific sizes.

WCRS – Wrap Conversion Ring Sling

- Options include length and shoulder type – gathered, pleated or hybrid
- Popular converters: Kalea Baby, Sleeping Baby Productions, Shiny Star Designs, Zanytoes
- Some wrap brands sell some of their wraps in ring sling form. Ex: Didymos, Girasol, KoKaDi, Lenny Lamb, Oscha

WCMT – Wrap Conversion Mei Tai: have wrap straps and ring or tie waist

WCHB – Wrap Conversion Half Buckle: typically have wrap straps with a buckle waist

WCFB – Wrap Conversion Full Buckle: padded straps and buckle waist (like a SSC)

- Options include padding in shoulders and waist, waist styles, size of carrier body and hood type
- Many converters make WCMT, WCHB and WCFB
- Popular converters: Anaira Creations, Bamberoo, Didytai by Didymos (WCMT only), Dream Carrier Threads, Kanaluti, Lenny Lamb (LL wraps only), Lily and Lotus, Madame Goo Goo, Metamorphosis Conversions, Ocah, Obimama, Shiny Star Designs, Tula (WCFB only), Two Momma Designs

WHERE TO FIND CARRIERS

BUY NEW:

Abby's Lane: <http://www.abbyslane.com/>

Birdie's Room: <http://www.birdiesroom.com/>

Marsupial Mamas: <http://www.marsupial-mamas.com/>

Mom's Milk Boutique: <http://www.momsmilkboutique.com/>

Pax Baby: <http://paxbaby.com/>

Also, check specific brand pages.

BUY USED:

The Babywearing Swap "The Big Swap": <https://www.facebook.com/groups/thebabywearingwap/>

Babywearing on a Budget (everything under \$100): <https://www.facebook.com/groups/156002947911287/>

TheBabywearer.com (free account required to access): <http://thebabywearer.com/forum/forums/for-sale-or-trade>

Many brands have specific B/S/T pages on Facebook.

LOCAL BABYWEARING GROUPS:

Babywearers of Lynchburg: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/BabywearersofLynchburg/>

Roanoke Babywearers: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/RoanokeBabywearers/>

Blue Ridge Babywearers: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/458053237577425/>

ONLINE RESOURCES:

TheBabywearer.com: <http://thebabywearer.com/>

- Create a free account and gain access to tons of babywearing resources, forums, details on all carriers, geeky threads about brands, and B/S/T boards.

Babywearing 102: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Babywearing102/>

Babywearing 102 on Pinterest: <http://www.pinterest.com/babywearing102/>

DIY Babywearing: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/247329292025830/>