

Practicality & Benefits of Babywearing

Babywearing allows the wearer to have two free hands to accomplish tasks such as laundry while caring for the baby's need to be held or breastfed. Babywearing offers a safer alternative to placing a car seat on top of a shopping cart. It also allows children to be involved in social interactions and to see their surroundings as an adult would.

In general, when wearing a baby it is important to stay attentive to the baby's interaction with the environment. Parents need a little more space to turn around to avoid bumping the baby into counters and doorways. Babies on the back may be able to reach things that the wearer cannot see. Carriers must be fit snugly and properly to avoid discomfort and promote safety and it is generally recommended with most carriers to avoid wearing an uncooperative child on the back. Babywearing can improve safety, especially in crowded areas such as airports, by keeping a child who might otherwise be able to run into a crowd safely attached to the parent. This also allows for you and your family to spend time in locations that might otherwise not be small child "friendly" and allows these younger ones to be exposed to a variety of learning experiences; for example, hiking or trail walking and crowded festivals or kids museums.

Many sling users have found that it is easier on the back and shoulders than carrying their infant in a car seat or pushing a stroller through uneven terrain or crowds as the weight of the child is spread more evenly across the upper body and no bending is required.

Several sources express concern that carriers which put all of a baby's weight on a narrow band of fabric at the crotch may cause problems with spinal growth, and advocate carriers which disperse most of the infant's weight between the hips and thighs so it is important to shop for options when finding a carrier. Several types of carriers allow for proper weight distribution such as wraps, "soft" carriers (ex: Ergo style or Asian style Carriers), or pouches. These types of carriers allow for the child's knees and thighs to be used for additional weight distribution and security.

Researchers have found that the close physical contact with the parent can help to stabilize an infant's heartbeat, temperature, and breathing. Especially, preterm infants often have difficulty coordinating their breathing and heart rate. Researchers also have found that mothers who use kangaroo care (carrying the infant close to the skin) often have more success with breastfeeding and improve their milk supply. Further, researchers have found that preterm infants who experience kangaroo care have longer periods of sleep, gain more weight, decrease their crying, have longer periods of alertness, an earlier hospital discharge.

Simple Safety Tips

- **Practice before you begin.** Try your baby carrier with a helper or large doll or baby-sized sack of potatoes and practice bending (bend your knees), moving through doorways (watch out for his "head!"), quick movements and getting the "baby" in and out.
- **When you start wearing your baby, support her with your arm until you are confident.**
- **Learn to wear your baby carrier properly and get it really comfortable.** This is important for your body and for your baby's safety.
- **Swap positions.** Change positions or swap shoulders regularly (perhaps each time you wear your baby). The sooner you start doing this, the easier it will be. Your baby might appreciate changing positions, especially if you are wearing them for long periods and you will stay balanced.
- **Continue to support your baby whenever you bend over** and bend from the knees!
- **Gradually build up your endurance.** This happens naturally if your baby is still small. If you are starting out with an older baby, try a few short sessions each day rather than one long one. Gradually increase the duration as your muscles adjust.
- **Check the seams, buckles and straps regularly.**
- **Beware of what you put in the carrier with the baby.** This is particularly important while your baby is young: keys, wallets, handkerchiefs can become hazards when they jiggle around and end up near your baby's face or poke into delicate flesh. Many baby carriers have built-in pockets to help contain these items.

Some Claimed benefits of Babywearing include:

- **Mothers' progesterone (the "mothering hormone") is increased** through physical contact with the infant, leading to a more intimate bond, and easier breastfeeding, thus lowering the incidence of postpartum depression.
- **Infants who are carried tend to be calmer** because all of their primal/survival needs are met. The caregiver can be seen, heard, smelled, touched, tasted, provide feeding and the motion necessary for continuing neural development, gastrointestinal and respiratory health and to establish vestibular balance and muscle tone is constant.
- **Decreases risk of positional plagiocephaly ("flat head syndrome")** caused by extended time spent in a car seat and by sleeping on the back (supine position). Sleeping on the back is recommended to decrease the risk of SIDS. Concern over plagiocephaly has also led the American Academy of Pediatrics to recommend that infants "should spend minimal time in car seats (when not a passenger in a vehicle) or other seating that maintains supine positioning. None of the babywearing positions require infants to lie supine while being carried
- **Wearing your baby promotes their physical development.** When your baby rides in a sling attached to your body, they are in tune with the rhythm of your breathing, the sound of your heartbeat, and the movements you make – walking, bending, and reaching. This stimulation helps them regulate their own physical responses, and also exercises their vestibular system, which controls balance. The sling is in essence a "transitional womb" for the new baby, who has difficulty controlling their bodily functions and movements. Premature babies who are touched and held gain weight faster and are healthier than babies who are not. Also carried babies are closer to people and can study facial expressions and be familiar with body language. Mechanical swings and other holding devices do not provide these same benefits