

# The benefits of babywearing

*You have probably seen a number of pictures on social media of celebrities wearing their new babies in carriers, and may be wondering if it's just another trend? In fact, soft slings were one of the first pieces of 'technology' ever invented, long before strollers became a convenience because early human populations needed a convenient way of transporting their baby around.<sup>1</sup> Since the 1970s they have become a firm part of Western culture, with a rapidly expanding range of types of carriers and slings, becoming ever-more popular because of the clear benefits that baby-carrying offers!*

## 1. THE BENEFITS OF BABYWEARING

The benefits are really endless, but here are some of our favourites:

- Convenient – there is really nothing more convenient than being totally handsfree when you are out and about, or even at home! You can transport your baby on your body without needing to lift and manoeuvre a heavy buggy or car seat. It doesn't need to be folded away so you can take one with you wherever you go!
- Babies love them – Dr Harvey Karp coined the term 'The Fourth Trimester'<sup>2</sup> which explains how before birth, fetuses experience a continuous symphony of stimulation. They are snugly enveloped by the walls of the uterus, frequently bobbing around, and hear constant loud sounds like blood coursing through the placental arteries. If we re-create this environment, such as with a baby sling/carrier, we activate a calming reflex, allowing the baby to settle easily and fall asleep.
- Babywearing can reduce the risk of post-partum depression. Being in close contact with your baby can enhance the release of a hormone called oxytocin, which can reduce a mother's risk of experiencing depressive symptoms<sup>3</sup>.
- Hands-free, discreet breastfeeding is possible, wherever you are! 2016 recommendations for preventing Sudden Infant Death Syndrome<sup>4</sup>, advised that mothers can safely breastfeed whilst their baby is in a baby carrier by ensuring they are safely repositioned after the feed.

## 2. HOW TO CHOOSE A BABY CARRIER

There are many different types of slings and carriers that are available, and choosing the right one for you, your baby and your lifestyle can make a huge difference in your comfort and enjoyment when using it!

Here are some important things to consider:

1. Type of carrier – many types exist. Wrap slings are the most traditional, usually made from one continuous piece of fabric that can be tied to hold your baby securely. They are snug and soft, especially for newborns. However they may not distribute the load evenly, which has an impact on the wearer's joints.
2. By contrast soft-structured carriers are easily adjustable and can position your baby's hips in a healthy ergonomic position, as well as distributing the weight across the wearer's back and shoulders.
3. Front or back carrying – you can use carriers in different positions as your baby grows so when choosing one, consider which are most suitable for your lifestyle.
4. Comfort – this will be determined by many factors like; fabrics of the sling, the weight, bulk and how easy it is to put on/off.

To help you decide which carrier to buy, it is best to try them out with your baby. Many baby stores have samples you can try, or search for your local sling library or ask a friend if you can borrow one! The most reliable way to know which sling you will get on with best is to try the sling for a few days. Studies have showed that prolonged wearing will impact your comfort while walking, more than if you only wear it for short periods.<sup>5</sup> Now you are ready, it is time to get started!

If you want to make sure you carry your baby in the safest way, be sure to follow the 'TICKS rule', recommended by The UK Sling Consortium<sup>6</sup>:

- **T**IGHT
- **I**N VIEW AT ALL TIMES
- **C**LOSE ENOUGH TO KISS
- **K**EEP CHIN OFF THE CHEST
- **S**UPPORTED BACK

Many slings and carriers are designed to be used with newborns and you can safely carry your baby from any age! The safest method of baby wearing is using a carrier that keeps the newborn baby solidly against the parent's body, in an upright position. Ensure you keep baby's chin off their chest, thereby keeping the airway free for breathing.

The top of your newborn's head should be close enough to kiss.

Remember babywearing doesn't have to stop when your baby is no longer a newborn.

Many slings are available for older babies and toddlers, and the benefits of carrying your child close continue as your baby grows!



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