

Baby wearing - the why, where & how



Natural Parenting in Sydney:
a guide to services & products

www.npsydney.com.au

Why carry your baby?

“It's convenient. You can breastfeed discretely in a sling while working, getting things done around the house, shopping or eating in a restaurant. If you have a baby who wants to be held all the time, this is an easy way to meet her needs while doing other things.

It helps mums care for older siblings.

It helps some babies to breastfeed better. Some babies, particularly those who are tense or tend to arch their backs, breastfeed better while moving. Also, babies who are slow to gain weight (for no apparent reason) have been known to gain better if carried in a sling for several hours a day.

It reduces crying and colic. Babies are happier because they have less need to cry, and parents enjoy their babies more as a result.

It enhances learning. Carried babies have enhanced visual and auditory alertness, and increased "quiet alertness" times. Carrying a baby promotes cognitive development and speech development, since babies are exposed to more experiences and conversations.

Carried babies are involved in their parents' world. They participate in life, rather than see it as a spectator.

Carrying your baby promotes bonding and enhances parents' feelings of competence. A higher frequency of feeding and touching stimulates mothering hormones, and frequent carrying encourages and speeds the development of a mutual reading of each other's cues.”

(MORE & Source:

<http://www.kellymom.com/parenting/sling.html#advantages>)

Carrier safety – what to avoid & what to look for

Some baby carriers are poorly designed and pose a suffocation risk (eg. 'bag' slings) or overload the child's spine and neck (eg. parachute harness).

Avoid 'Bag' slings

'Bag' slings can place an infant at risk of respiratory distress, oxygen deprivation or even suffocation because:

1. They curl the baby's chin into her/his chest, compressing windpipe
2. They do not prevent the baby's head from rotating and pressing against the side of the carrier
3. The depth of the carrier, the gathered edges and the thick fabric mean the wearer cannot see or feel the child

and so detect infant distress.



Unsafe carrier – 'Bag' sling

(MORE & Source: M'Liss Stelzer, baby wearing educator & former registered nurse; www.babyslingsafety.blogspot.com)

Avoid 'Parachute harness' Soft Structured Carriers

Parachute harness soft structured carriers are the easiest of all carriers to use, however they "position the infant upright, with the legs hanging down and the bodyweight supported at the base of the baby's spine (i.e. at the crotch), it puts undue stress on the spine which can adversely affect the development of the spinal curves and, in some cases, cause spondylolisthesis" and/or a whiplash type injury (MORE & Source: <http://www.continuum-concept.org/reading/spinalStress.html>).

The carrier pictured shows the baby's legs dangling down. While recent models are designed with back support for the wearer, they still place most of the load on the upper back, which is exactly where you don't want

it!



Unsafe carrier – 'Parachute harness' soft structured carriers

Safe carrier features

“You should look for the following in any type of carrier:

1. Before an infant can hold her head on her own, the carrier should support the neck. A sling cradles the infant just like your arms would, unlike [parachute harness] vertical carriers which can actually allow a whiplash type injury.
2. The carrier should not place the infant's spine in a weight bearing position too early*. The young baby should be horizontal or inclined, with the spine supported along its length [or held vertically with correct hip positioning and spinal/head support, as in a wrap]
3. When a baby wants to be more upright to see the world around him (usually around age 4 to 5 months), the carrier should allow him to sit cross-legged [or in the ‘frog-leg position’], so his weight is dissipated through his legs and hips, as opposed to the style that has the legs hanging down, where the young spine has to bear the entire weight.”

(MORE & Source:

<http://www.continuum-concept.org/reading/spinalStress.html>).

* An infant's spine should only be in a weight bearing position when they can bear their own weight unaided, ie. When they can sit on their own. So don't prop your baby up in a pram either!



Newborns naturally adopt the **‘frog leg position’**, which you copy in a carrier

When carrying a child in an upright position, the **knees must be higher than the bottom**

Choosing a carrier

1. "What is your child/baby's age?"
2. How much do you want to spend?
3. What do you want to do while your child is in the carrier?
Are you planning on using your carrier to get the housework done or cook dinner? Do you want to use it when out shopping? For family weekend hikes? Do you want a carrier that fits all of the above?
4. What length of time do you want to carry the baby for?
5. Will you be sharing the carrier with others? Is it possible to adjust the carrier for a custom fit?
6. What is the weather like in your area?
7. What kind of learning curve are you looking for? Will you have help to learn to use your carrier?
8. Will you be breastfeeding in the carrier?
9. How easy should it be to take the carrier off without waking the baby?
10. Do you want a carrier with you at all times? Does it need to be compact and portable?"

(Source: <http://www.carryingaway.com.au/category-s/171.htm>)

Types of Carrier

All the carriers below can be used from newborn to preschooler, they can be worn on the front, hip or back and are suitable for a broad range of activities (housework, cooking dinner, shopping, bushwalking etc.). However some carriers are *more suitable* than others for each activity and age.

Different carriers place the weight of the child on different parts of our body – talk to an experienced baby wearer to find out which style is best for you (see 'Baby wearing support' at the end of this article).

One-shoulder carriers

Pouch (Brands: Earthsling, Hot Slings, Peanut Shell)

Ring Sling- unpadded (Brands: Ellaroo, TaylorMade)

Clip Sling - padded (Brands: Baba Slings, Natures Sway)



Pouch (no clip or ring)

Ring Sling

Clip sling (view of clip)

Two-shoulder carriers

Two-shoulder carriers are better suited for hanging out the washing (so you can raise your arms above your shoulders) and for longer periods of time for older babies/toddlers/preschoolers.

Stretch Wrap 0-6mths, front only (Brands: Hug-A-Bub, Moby)

Woven Wrap 0-5yrs (Brands: Ellaroo, Storchenwiege)

Mei Tai (Brands: ABA, Kozy Carrier, CatBird Baby)

Non-parachute Soft Structured Carriers (Brands: Ergo, Patapum, Pikkilo)



Stretch wrap

Woven wrap

Mei Tai

Structured carriers

Baby wearing support

Despite the risks, parachute harness carriers are the most popular and readily available, as they are so simple to use and inexperienced baby wearers would be unaware of their poor design.

Most safe carriers take time and practice to master. People often abandon them as they find 'my baby didn't like it' or 'it was uncomfortable' but this was simply because they were using it incorrectly.

So what's the solution? Get support!

In-real-life support

Inner West & Beyond Attachment Parenting Playgroup runs two playgroups in Sydney- in Newtown and Homebush – and we communicate through this forum:

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ap_innerwest/

Most members do some or all of the following – baby wear, extended breastfeeding, co-sleeping, cloth nappy wearing, gentle discipline, healthy eating... You're more than welcome to come along to try carriers and practice your baby wearing.

Online support group

Baby Carriers Downunder (www.baby-carriers-downunder.com) is a national support group through which you can:

1. meet other babywearing parents online and locally for support
2. get advice choosing the best baby carrier for your needs (and where to buy them)
3. try out different carriers before you buy through our national Carrier Loaners Program
4. get help with using a baby carrier correctly and comfortably.

Buying a carrier

Natural Parenting in Sydney: a guide to services & products, lists a number of online carrier suppliers and suppliers of breastfeeding tops (the 'lift the flap style' make BF in a sling easy).

Please feel free to contact Jenny from *NP in Sydney* if you would like:

To talk through the best carrier for your specific needs
Advice on the best supplier

Email – visit the website www.npsydne.com.au

Mobile - 0412 970 183 (*outside* the hours of 12 noon-2:30 pm)