

babywearing 101

A HOW-TO PRIMER ON POUCHES, SLINGS, WRAPS—AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN



cradle



reverse cradle



high back



back



*snuggle, front facing in
(tummy-to-tummy)*



*front facing out,
legs in (kangaroo)*



*front facing out,
legs out*



hip

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babywearing *bliss*

Carry your little one—safely and with panache!

BY M'LISS STELZER

Instinctually, babywearing always struck a chord with me. It felt *right*—I wanted my children nestled close to me, within kissing range. As a former NICU nurse, I also knew that babywearing was best for babies' psychological and physical development. However, following this philosophy wasn't free of challenges.

When my daughter was born, I carried her in a front pack-style carrier until she was ten months old. After the birth of my son, I carried him in the same carrier that had worked for his sister. However, by the time he was five months old, my son

weighed almost 20 pounds. He was such a little chunk that his legs would turn blue after 15 or 20 minutes in the carrier, and *my* lower back was starting to ache. I was frantic. With a toddler to chase, I needed to carry my son hands-free. There had to be some other type of carrier I could use.

I turned to the Internet and was astonished to find countless carriers available online: pouches, ring slings, wraps, Asian styles, hip carriers, and more, all in different fabrics and designs. I was overwhelmed, but determined to find a carrier suited for my son *and* for me.

Fast-forward a year: I never did find that *one* perfect carrier. Instead I found . . . well, I won't count them all, but that's me—I'm crazy about baby carriers, in *all* of their different incarnations. You, on the other hand, may need only one or two carriers in your life. This article aims to help you find them.

I've followed my babywearing bliss by teaching babywearing classes and doing personal consultations, and I've researched

the importance of correct positioning and how it impacts the oxygenation levels of newborns (see page 10). I have tried and tested more than 60 brands of carriers. I use pouches and ring slings around the house or at the playground, where the kids want up and down a lot. When I need to run a quick errand, I can pop my son or daughter in a sling. For longer expeditions, such as hiking or grocery shopping, I like my Ergo carrier and mei tais. And I love my wraps for cuddling my daughter or breastfeeding my son. Even though my daughter is now four years old, sometimes she just needs that special TLC that comes from snuggling into me as I do things around the house. My husband also appreciates the mobile nurturing he can give to our children via babywearing. It makes life easier for the whole family.

Read on to find out how babywearing can make life easier for your family too. After outlining the benefits of babywearing, I answer common questions and concerns, and then provide the meat of the story—a pictorial primer on the basic ways of carrying as well as the types of babywearing devices. You'll be educated in kangaroo, cradle, and snuggle carries, as well as in typical carriers, from the easiest to the most complex: pouches, ring slings, Asian-style, soft packs, and wraps. Read the list of dos and don'ts and the instructions on the correct positioning of infants, and you're set! The resources on page 14 offer additional support.

Happy babywearing!

M'Liss Stelzer, a Registered Nurse, is now a stay-at-home mom to two babywearing-savvy children (4 and 2) and wife to a busy pediatrician. She and her family live in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

why babywearing's the best

Fewer tears and better sleep are just two ways babies benefit from being close to you.

B Y M A R I A B L O I S

Biologically, babies *need* to be carried in order to thrive. Studies have shown that otherwise well nourished and cared for infants who are deprived of human touch fail to thrive, and can even die.

Research shows that babies who are held often:

- **Cry less:** The more babies are held, the less they cry. The long-term consequences of letting infants cry without responding are just beginning to be understood. One study found that letting babies cry *permanently* alters the nervous system by flooding the developing brain with stress hormones. This makes these babies overly sensitive to future trauma, and may lead to incidents of post-traumatic stress and panic disorders in adulthood. Babies who cry less in the first few months cry less in the following year. Responding quickly to your crying baby is an investment—the less she cries now, the more peaceful the upcoming year will be.
- **Are more calm and content:** Carried babies have a more regular respiratory rate, heart rate, and steady internal body temperature. Even very tiny premature babies can be carried safely in a sling without danger of compromised breathing or heart rate.
- **Sleep more peacefully:** Keeping baby close helps baby organize his sleep/wake cycles. Nap times are spent in constant motion, close to mother's heart, and nighttime is dark and still, with a loved parent nearby. This helps baby know the difference between daytime and nighttime, an important step in sleeping longer stretches at night. One study of premature infants found that babies had longer

intervals of quiet sleep when they had skin-to-skin contact with mother.

- **Nurse better, gain weight better:** Research has shown that premature babies who are touched and held gain weight faster and are healthier than babies who are not. Full-term babies nurse more frequently when they are carried close to mother.

- **Enjoy better digestion:** The constant motion and frequent small feedings associated with carrying baby can promote good digestion. Babies who are carried often spit up less. Babies with gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) can benefit from being carried in the upright position after a feeding. When baby is upright, the force of gravity helps the acid stay down in the stomach where it belongs.

- **Develop better:** Babies who are held experience human touch and movement. This stimulation has been shown to have a positive effect on the baby's development. Carrying baby enhances motor skills by stimulating the vestibular system (used for balance). Baby constantly readjusts as mother moves around, using his developing muscles to hold his head up, kick his feet and use his arms to cling to mother. Because soft carriers keep pressure off the back of the

head, carried babies are at a much lower risk for plagiocephaly (asymmetrical head shape). Carrying baby naturally limits the time baby spends in hard plastic carriers, such as carseats, automatic swings, and such. Holding baby while moving counts as "tummy time."

Excerpt from Babywearing: The Benefits and Beauty of This Ancient Tradition, by Maria Blois, MD (Pharmasoft Publishing, 2005).



so you've tried before and failed...

"I tried a baby carrier, but my baby hated it."

First, determine how baby prefers to be held in your arms; then, using the carrier, mimic this position.

For instance, a baby who hates being cradled in your arms will likely hate being cradled in a pouch. If baby loves being nestled high on mom's chest, she's likely to be happy and content when swaddled in the same position. Some babies like their legs curled, and others like them straight.



The advantage of an unstructured fabric carrier is that it is possible to cater to even the most finicky baby. Babies will often fuss a little when first placed in a carrier, but once the wearer starts moving, most babies will quickly calm down. If your baby doesn't, assess other factors: Is the carrier digging into baby anywhere? Is baby overheated, or maybe just hungry?



Most important, check that baby is in the correct position. For newborns, see page 53. With older babies, remember that once they become interested in the world around them, they may fuss if placed facing inward, or too deep to see what's going on. Usually, after working with the carrier a few times, both mom and baby will figure out what is mutually comfortable.

tip: Get the help of an experienced babywearer.

If hands-on help from a local babywearer isn't available, look under "In-Person Help" in the "For More Information" section, on page 14, for resources.

Babywearing has exploded in popularity

in the last few years. In the 1970s I carried my babies in a corduroy Snuggli and made a backpack from a Kelty kit. By the 1980s, *Mothering* was publishing articles on making your own baby carrier and how to wrap a rebozo. Over the Shoulder Baby Holder was founded in 1987, and two years later, Dr. William Sears, creator of the NoJo baby carrier, wrote an article for us on a new phenomenon: the sling. Other pioneers in the field of baby carriers include Baby Trekker, Baby Wrap, New Native, and Maya Wrap.

"I tried using a baby carrier, but it hurt my back."

Buy from experts. The best way to find a comfortable carrier that will be useful from the newborn through the toddler stages is to buy one from a company that specializes in baby carriers. These companies—often small, Internet-only

businesses run by work-at-home moms—are dedicated to creating safe, top-notch carriers. And because they actually use their own products, these proprietors can often troubleshoot any problems.

For a baby carrier to be comfortable, it needs to hold the child at the same level and height as when the child is held in the wearer's arms.



Pulled in close with legs wrapped around mom's waist.

Most commonly available front-pack carriers support the child by the crotch and leave the legs dangling down. This position causes the child's weight to pull down and away from the wearer's body, causing unnatural stress on the wearer's back and shoulders.



Front pack-style carry with a three-year old.



Cuddling with mom, asleep in gauze wrap.

Proper positioning correctly distributes the child's weight, so that carrying will not be painful, even as the child grows.

In just the last two years, there have been major changes in the industry, and many new carriers have come on the market. This article does not attempt to review them all, but rather recommends some to illustrate proper positioning and safety. We did not solicit samples of carriers for this review, however, so it is not comprehensive. Additional carriers are listed in "For More Information" on page 14. If we've omitted any, please let us know.

—PEGGY O'MARA, EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

great gear *and how*

Wear your baby in style with the cornucopia of carriers available.

keep-it-simple pouches

hip carry in a fitted pouch



FOLD TUBE OF FABRIC.



SLIP OVER YOUR HEAD.



DROP BABY IN.



ADJUST.



ALL DONE!

fitted pouches

A fitted pouch is simply a tube of fabric sized to fit the wearer. Because there are no rings, snaps, or buckles to work with, fitted pouches are often considered the training wheels of babywearing. The pouch is sized according to the wearer's weight, height, chest breadth, and shoulder-to-hip length.

Favorites: Hotslings, Peanut Shell

adjustable pouches

These pouches can be sized via snaps, zippers, drawstrings, or Aplix (similar to Velcro but much stronger). (On some pouch/ring-sling hybrids, the rings are used for adjustment.) Adjustable pouches can be conveniently shared among caregivers, and easily accommodate weight loss or gain, or bulky winter clothing. On the downside, they're somewhat bulky, and repositioning the baby—for instance, from a front to a back carry—may be slightly more challenging because the pouch's structural elements can drag or bunch.

Favorites: Mom-and-Me Creations (Pea in a Pod), Kangaroo Korner Adjustable Fleece, UpMama (hybrid)

Positions: Pouches are most commonly used for the cradle, kangaroo, and hip carries (see reprint cover for carry types); they can also be used for back carries.

Tips: A fabric containing 2 percent Lycra is best: it's the most comfortable; it allows the pouch to conform to the shoulder, which prevents the pouch from slipping; and it gives the pouch a slight amount of bounce that can keep a wiggly baby from wrenching mom's back.

A padded rail (the sling's outer or inner edge) turned to the outside makes it easier to get a newborn into the pouch by giving mom a handle and keeping the fabric from falling over baby's face. If baby wants to sit up, it provides a small cushion for the head. If baby is held in a hip carry, the padded rail, turned to the inside, cushions the back of baby's legs.

to use it

Here are the basic types and step-by-step instructions. **BY M'LISS STELZER**

versatile ring slings

kangaroo carry in an open-tail sling



SLIP THE SLING OVER ONE ARM AND HEAD.



CREATE A POUCH FOR BABY.



SETTLE BABY INTO THE SLING.



TIGHTEN ANY SLACK BY PULLING ON THE TAIL.



MAKE SURE BABY IS SECURE. VOILÀ!

A **ring sling** is a long loop of fabric that runs through a set of adjustable rings. There are two types of ring slings: closed-tail and open-tail.

In a closed-tail sling, the fabric ends in a strap that can be adjusted for different-size wearers or for ease of removing a baby. Most closed-tail slings are padded at the shoulder and in the rails. While shoulder padding may add comfort, many mothers find that, in general, padding adds unnecessary bulk to the sling; rail padding, especially, can get stuck in the rings.

In an open-tail sling, a wide length of fabric passes through the rings. With the tail open, individual sections of the fabric can be adjusted for a more customized fit. While it often takes longer to learn to use an open-tail than a closed-tail sling, the open-tail variety offers versatility, increased comfort for the wearer, and a more secure carry for the child. The tail can be used for shade, or as a breastfeeding cover-up, blanket, or burp cloth. The pocket in the tail can hold a diaper, wipes, and a small wallet.

There are a variety of wonderful sling fabrics, including organic cotton, stretchy blends, sun-protective cloth, and

others. However, a dupioni- or shantung-silk ring sling is unsurpassed for comfort. Silk is supportive yet lightweight and breathable, and it runs through rings smoothly while staying put after adjustment.

Favorites: Oopa Baby, Sleeping Baby Productions, ZoloWear, EllaRoo, Maya Wrap (lightly padded shoulder), Pretty Momma Sling

Positions: Ring slings are most commonly used for the cradle, reverse cradle, snuggle, kangaroo, and hip and back carries.

Tips: Make sure the rings used are made specifically for slings; the thin, welded rings sold in crafts stores are not safe to hold a baby. Rings created for slings, commonly made of aluminum or nylon, are safety-tested to 250 pounds and sold at www.slingrings.com. There are many different shoulder styles for both open- and closed-tail slings. Many moms find shoulder styles that offer some articulation to be more comfortable.

adventurous asian style

tummy-to-tummy in a mei tai carrier



WRAP THE SHORT STRAPS AROUND YOUR WAIST. TIE A SECURE KNOT.



HOLDING BABY AGAINST YOUR CHEST, PULL THE PANEL UP OVER BABY'S BACK.



PLACE THE LONG STRAPS OVER YOUR SHOULDERS.



CROSS THE STRAPS.



CROSS STRAPS OVER CHILD AND KNOT.

An Asian-style carrier features square or rectangular panels of fabric and two or four straps, which are used to secure the baby to the wearer. The *onbuhimo*, *podegi*, *hmong*, and *bei bei* carriers use two straps; the *mei tai* (pronounced *may-tie*) uses four. The mei tai is the most popular type of Asian-style carrier. For more information on the different types of Asian-style carriers, go to www.freehandbaby.com/instructions.php.

Asian-style carriers come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and fabrics. Most have fairly narrow, padded straps; others have wider, unpadded straps that hug the babywearer's shoulder in the same way an unpadded ring sling or wrap does. Some have flaps or hoods that can be pulled up to support a sleeping baby's head, or left down when not needed. For a toddler, a carrier with a larger panel, such as a Kozy, will hold the child more securely and offer better head support should the child fall asleep.

Favorites: Kozy (larger panel, supportive canvas fabric), Napsack (contoured body and wide, wrap-like shoulder straps), FreeHand Baby Carriers (smaller panel), Babyhawk (medium-size panel, but also offered in extra-tall and/or with flip-up headrest), Sachi (medium panel), Mei Tai Baby (adjustable feature narrows the bottom of the carrier)

Positions: Asian-style carriers are most commonly used for the snuggle, back, and high-back carries and can be used for hip carries.

Tips: If the wearer wishes to use a mei tai with a taller panel for a newborn or smaller baby, rolling the bottom of the carrier will make it shorter. Tiny babies normally must have their legs flexed and inside the carrier.

For babies who don't want to have their legs inside the carrier, a smaller-bodied or contoured mei tai lets the legs hang free.



ALL DONE!

PHOTOS THIS PAGE PROVIDED BY FREEHAND BABY CARRIERS AND MIRACULOUS MEMORIES

easy-to-learn soft packs

back carry in a soft pack



BUCKLE WAIST BELT.



SCOOT BABY ONTO YOUR BACK.



BRING UP PANEL AND SHOULDER STRAPS.



BUCKLE STERNUM STRAP.



TIGHTEN SHOULDER STRAPS.

Soft-pack carriers are based on Asian-style carriers but are modernized with buckles, extra padding in the shoulder straps, and/or a wide, padded waist belt to distribute weight onto the hips. This style of carrier is the easiest two-shoulder carrier to learn. It bypasses the “dragging strap problem” of Asian-style and wrap carriers, and its backpack-like style appeals to dads. Even though they do not have a frame, soft-pack carriers are still fairly structured. As such, they tend to offer fewer positioning options, and are much less adjustable than the unstructured Asian-style carriers on which they’re based.

Favorites: Ergo, Patapum, Beco Baby

Positions: Soft-structured packs are most often used for the snuggle and/or back carries. Some are designed for hip carries.

Tips: Because soft carriers are more structured, there is often difficulty fitting those wearers who are not of average build. Mamas under five feet tall find the shoulder straps too long, and those over six feet may find the straps too short. Very thin or plus-size parents may also find it challenging to achieve a comfortable fit. Because in a soft-pack carrier the baby always faces the wearer, this type of carrier is not optimal for an infant who insists on facing outward.



CHECK THAT PANEL IS HIGH ON BABY'S BACK AND BABY IS SEATED DEEPLY IN THE CARRIER.

oh-so-comfortable wraps

tummy-to-tummy in a wrap



CENTER THE WRAP IN FRONT OF YOU.



BRING FABRIC AROUND TO THE BACK AND OVER YOUR SHOULDER.



REPEAT WITH THE OTHER SIDE, MAKING AN "X" ON YOUR BACK.



PULL OPEN THE POCKET AND SETTLE BABY IN.



CROSS FABRIC OVER BABY AND KNOT IN BACK.



MAKE SURE FABRIC IS SPREAD OUT.

A wrap, or wraparound carrier, is a long, rectangular piece of cloth. Wraps are the most unstructured of baby carriers, and learning to use them demands patience and flexibility. But the effort is well worth it: wraps are incredibly, magically comfortable, and can be tied in a multitude of ways to suit many body types and carry positions.

Stretchy wraps are wonderful for beginners because they can be pre-tied, and the baby can be popped in and out easily. They're best for newborns or small children; heavy children (usually more than 20 pounds) will stretch the fabric to the point where it is no longer supportive. A hybrid wrap that is slightly stretchy but also supportive can be used for a larger baby or toddler. German-style woven wraps made of fabrics that have a subtle "grip" offer more support and security and can be used from newborns on up.

Favorite Stretchy Wraps: Moby, Hug-a-bub, Joey Wrap (The Joey Wrap gently bounces baby as you move.)

Favorite Hybrid Wraps: Gypsy Mama's Bali Baby Stretch, Mom-and-Me Creations' Hot Mama

Favorite German-style Woven Wraps: Didymos, Storchenwiege, Hoppediz

Tips: There are several things to consider when purchasing a readymade wrap or making one using your own fabric: there must be enough width (usually about 28 inches) to cover baby adequately; the fabric should be able to support baby's weight without sagging; and the wrap should have enough stretch to conform to baby, but not so much that it permits him or her to lean outward.

Wraps do have a downside: with several yards of fabric wrapped around wearer and baby, it can get warm. Cooking in a hot kitchen or braving the summer heat will be cooler in a hand-dyed Gypsy Mama Bali Baby Breeze gauze wrap—or an EllaRoo wrap made of 100 percent handwoven Guatemalan cotton. But because these wraps are made of thin fabrics, it's important to wrap an older child carefully to prevent painful pressure points: small areas on the wearer's body—usually the shoulders—bearing a much larger proportion of the weight.

PHOTOS THIS PAGE PROVIDED BY GYPSY MAMA

wear your baby right

Carrying your child in the correct position ensures that baby will breathe with ease.

BY M'LISS STELZER

safety first!

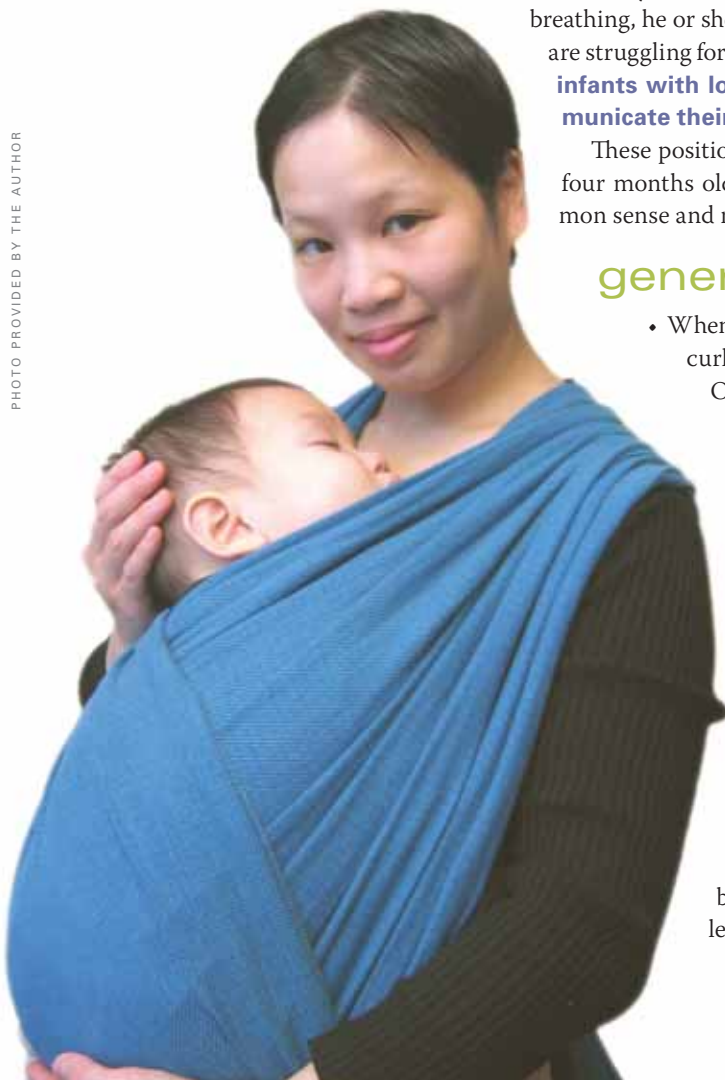
The most obvious issue of safety in babywearing is to make sure the child is securely attached to the wearer. But there is another, less obvious issue: good ventilation for the baby's ease of breathing. Often, parents assume that if a baby has difficulty breathing, he or she will fuss or cry—and indeed, most infants will protest if they are struggling for breath. **However, newborns, babies born prematurely, or infants with low muscle tone or developmental delays may not communicate their distress.** Precautions are outlined in this section.

These positioning recommendations are for use with infants from birth to four months old. But no matter your baby's age and weight, please use common sense and monitor baby frequently.

general guidelines

- When placing a newborn in a carrier, baby should *not* be tightly curled, chin to chest; this position partially closes baby's airway. Once baby becomes old enough to have good head control, the neck muscles are generally strong enough to keep the airway clear, even if baby becomes slightly curled or slumped in a carrier (or car seat, swing, bouncer, etc.).
- Sling fabric should *not* be draped across baby's face. With slings made of thin, airy fabrics, check for airflow by placing the fabric over your own nose and mouth. No matter how "breathable" the fabric looks, if *you* find it difficult to breathe through, it will be difficult for baby as well.
- Baby's face should not be pressed tightly against the wearer's body. Position the face upward when baby is not actively nursing; during nursing, ensure that baby's nose is not blocked.
- An infant should be repositioned if he or she shows *any* sign of respiratory difficulty. Symptoms include: rapid or labored breathing, grunting or sighing with every breath, and/or restlessness.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE AUTHOR



PROPER POSITIONING

cradle carry

pouches and closed-tail slings

The amount of modification necessary to correctly position an infant in a pouch depends on the depth of the pouch and the size of the baby. Usually, once baby weighs between 8 and 12 pounds, modifications are no longer necessary.



Equal amount of fabric in front of and behind baby, and bum is centered on pouch seam.



Pulling more fabric against the wearer's chest and/or moving the pouch seam slightly behind baby's back can change the pouch's depth.

correct positioning

When placing a newborn in a pouch or a closed-tail sling, a support pillow or receiving blanket may be necessary. The depth of the pouch and/or the size of the baby will determine which is most appropriate. It is especially important that a supportive surface be used for **premature infants** carried in a pouch or a sling because these babies have low muscle tone and extremely poor head control.

If you are using a support pillow in a deep pouch, place it behind baby's head and back. Support pillows and instructions on how to make them can be found at www.newnativebaby.com.

If you are using a folded receiving blanket in a shallow pouch, place it *only* behind baby's back, not behind baby's head.



To keep baby centered on the folded blanket, it is often easier to spread out a receiving blanket, place a second folded blanket on top of that, then center baby on the second folded blanket.



Mom is using a smaller pouch, and support pillow is under baby.



Pouch is too big for mom, and baby is hanging too low; no support pillow under baby.

ring slings

Baby's body should lie diagonally across the width of the sling, her head nearer the outer rail and her legs nearer the inner rail. This allows baby's body to stretch out,



To correctly place an infant in an open-tail sling, begin by putting the baby in more of a tummy-to-tummy position, with her trunk perpendicular to the rails; then slide baby down into the sling by lowering her upper body sideways.

keeps the outer rail from flopping over her face, and makes it easier to tighten the sling properly without completely changing her position.

If baby is too "deep" in the sling, pull on the tail, focusing on the middle of the sling, until the pouch is the right depth to raise and straighten baby.



One of the most common mistakes made with ring slings is positioning the baby in the pouch parallel to the rails. This basically folds the baby in half.

tummy-to-tummy carry

ring slings



DO

To keep baby upright and supported against the wearer's chest, tighten the top and bottom rails as well as the *middle* of the sling. The top rail is used to support baby's neck and head.

mei tais

Baby should be placed on the wearer's chest, the carrier brought up behind baby's back and the shoulder straps draped over the wearer's shoulders. While supporting baby with one hand, reach back and grab one shoulder strap, and with a firm but gentle pulling motion, tighten the strap until it is fairly snug. Repeat with the opposite strap. (This can also be done with one hand pulling both shoulder straps at the same time.) The shoulder straps should then be brought around and tied securely behind baby's back. If there is enough length, the straps can be crossed, brought around the wearer's back, and tied.



DO

Baby is properly supported by the carrier's body, and shoulder straps are tied firmly across baby's back.



DON'T

Mei tai not tied tightly enough; baby has begun to slump, his body dropping deeper into the carrier body.

wraps



DON'T

It is very easy to tie a wrap incorrectly so there is not enough support for the baby's back.



To see if baby is positioned correctly, press a hand against his back. If baby moves closer—that is, his tummy moves up against yours and he uncurls somewhat—then the wrap is not giving his back enough support.



DO

The wrap should then be retied so that baby is in an upright, straight position instead of curled.

making it work

Troubleshooting common problems

BY DARIEN WILSON

do

Rings are in corsage position, in the hollow under mom's shoulder. Shoulder folds are pulled out, and sling cups form mom's shoulder.



Baby's legs are bent and spread like a frog's around mom. Baby's bottom is lower than his knees, so baby can't slip out. Fabric is spread evenly from baby's neck to his knees.



Fabric is spread wide across mom's back and shoulder. The wider the fabric is spread, the more comfortable the sling is for mom.



Baby rides high on mom's body. Wearing baby at or above her waist is more comfortable for mom's back.



Baby is pulled in close to mom. A snug top rail is more comfortable for mom's back.



don't



A narrow band of fabric puts all the weight on mom's neck. Low rings create a smaller pouch for baby. Moving the shoulder folds toward mom's neck makes the top rail too loose; baby is leaning back, too far away from mom.



Baby's legs hang straight down. Baby could slip out of the bottom of the sling—only friction keeps him in the sling.



Fabric twisted narrowly across mom's back digs in to create pressure points.



Wearing baby this low causes back fatigue for mom.



Top rail is too loose and baby leans too far back. Baby and mom do not feel secure, and a leaning baby hurts mom's back.

Note: While the images above are of a baby carried in a ring sling, these "Dos and Don'ts" apply to all types of baby carriers.

Darien Wilson is the owner of ZoloWear.

for more information

Websites

www.kozycarrier.com—Excellent instructions on how to wear a mei tai.

www.mothering.com and **www.attachedtobaby.com**—Both of these sites sponsor babywearing forums.

www.oopababy.com—Help in using ring slings.

www.RebozoWay.org—Rebozo Way is a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating the public about traditional methods of birthing, family, and community relationships, and about in-arms and attachment parenting as practiced by indigenous peoples around the world.

www.thebabywearer.com—This terrific if somewhat overwhelming site is dedicated almost entirely to babywearing. It offers a product directory, articles, and reviews of baby carriers and babywearing-related products. The discussion forums are very active; experienced members offer basic advice to new babywearers as well as discuss the minutiae of wrap weaves, sling shoulder styles, etc.

www.the-ergo-lady.com—Soft-pack instructions as well as tips and tricks.

www.WearYourBaby.com—The site of the Mamatoto Project, which offers babywearing instructions, videos, tutorials, and easy directions on how to make your own no-sew baby carrier.

www.zolowear.com—For comprehensive help in how to use your ring sling, click on “Wearing.”

E-mail Group

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/babywearing—One of several babywearing e-mail groups to be found on Yahoo. Another focuses on sewing your own carriers, and one is strictly for buying and selling used carriers.

DVD and Video Streams

Tummy 2 Tummy—Produced for the beginning babywearer, this DVD includes more than 2.5 hours of information about pouches, ring slings, mei tais, and wraps.

For online video streams, see **www.oopababy.com** (ring slings), **www.zolowear.com** (pouches, ring slings), **www.jenncatsmeow.com** (pouches, ring slings, Asian-style), and **www.wearyourbaby.org** (wraps, ring slings).

Book

Blois, Maria, MD. *Babywearing: The Benefits and Beauty of This Ancient Tradition*. Pharmasoft Publishing, 2005. This comprehensive book offers instructions on choosing and using a baby carrier.

In-Person Help

www.nineinnineout.org—Nine In Nine Out (NINO) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping caregivers learn to wear their babies. Go to “Groups” to see if there is a chapter in your area.

www.thebabywearer.com—See the “Teaching and Advocacy” forum, then the subforum “Classes, Workshops and Babywearing Groups.”

Carriers Galore

As you can see by the list below, carriers are available in abundance online. With babywearing on the rise, new companies join the marketplace rapidly. E-mail marketing@mothering.com to let us know of any other great carrier vendors that may not be listed here.

www.attachedtot.com

www.babybundler.com

www.babyhawk.com

www.babyholder.com

www.babytrekker.com

www.bundlesofluv.ca

www.didymos.de/english

www.divasnbabes.com

www.dreambirdstudio.com

www.ecobabies.com

www.edenbabycarrier.com

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M'Liss Stelzer would like to acknowledge New Native Baby and Maya Wrap for providing equipment used in her study of correct positioning. Special thanks to Holly McCroskey, Darien Wilson, and Amy Abreu.

my other coat is an *amautik*

For carrying baby in frigid temperatures, discover an ingenious parka from the indigenous people of northern Canada.

BY JENNIFER GORDON

I am a babywearing mama who lives in North Bay, Ontario, Canada. My ancestral heritage being Norwegian, Finnish, Irish, and English, the love of cold is in my blood. But staying warm while wearing a baby in the lovely but frigid Canadian winters presented a problem. I found the solution in the *amautik* (AH-mow-TEA), the traditional garment used by the Inuit of Nunavut, the Canadian north.

As functional as it is beautiful, the amautik is a large parka with a broad hood and, most important, a pouch inside the parka for carrying a child against the wearer's back. The child is placed in an amautik by being lifted over the mother's head and lowered into the *amaut*, or pouch. A good little jiggle then settles the child into the pouch. The cut of an amautik's sleeves and shoulders are generous enough to allow the mother to carry the child on her back and the child to have access to the breast from inside the garment.

The large hood covers mother and child, with the excess fabric off to one side. This gap permits air to flow down to the little one, and lets the child stand and peek out the side with his face beside his mother's. (It may actually appear as if the child is being carried in the hood.) A small baby will "disappear" into an amautik's warmth; a larger baby, toddler, or child will be able to sit, stand, and move around in the back of his mother's amaut. In a properly fitted amautik, the child's weight is evenly distributed from below the mother's breasts to the top of her shoulders and is thus easily carried.

The unique cut and pattern of each amautik reveal details about an Inuit woman's age, her geographical home, the season, and her family tradi-



tions or beliefs. The design and construction of the amautik have been passed down through generations of Inuit women and are their intellectual property. If this garment is not protected and respected, there is a risk that—like the kamik (*mukluk*), the duffle sock, and the kayak, all innovations created by the Inuit people—the amautik will be appropriated for mass consumption with no recognition of the intellectual property rights of its creators.

To learn more about the women of Nunavut, visit www.pauktuutit.ca.

Jennifer Gordon is a work-at-home mother of two young children; she loves to adventure and play outdoors with her kids in all kinds of weather. For more information about the amautik, visit www.hipbundles.com.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE AUTHOR

the magic cloth

Feeling bedraggled and ugly, a new mom finds that a gorgeous sling transforms her from frumpy mama to fashionista.

BY ROBIN DUTTON-COOKSTON

WHEN I BECAME A PARENT, my traditional accoutrements of femininity went by the wayside. Necklaces became pull toys for busy, exploring hands. Scarves served as nooses for strangling mama. Gabardine blazers, cashmere ponchos, silk wraps—all were covered in puke, breastmilk, urine, or some combination of the above. I stuffed these accessories into the back of my closet, along with any expectations of sartorial beauty.

Most of the time, when I hovered about my daughter, Grace, I considered my day a success if I remembered to wear deodorant. And the only pre-pregnancy clothes that fit me were the ones with grandma-style elastic waistbands. Then, a girlfriend who had started her own business making baby slings gave me one of her top-notch beauties as a gift. This time-tested baby carrier rapidly became my most prized fashion embellishment.

To the nonparent, it may sound a bit odd to say that my most precious fashion item held a baby. (At least I'm not completely cheesing out by suggesting that my best accessory was the baby herself.) But unlike many baby carriers, their fabrics printed with tacky ducky and teddy-bear designs, this sling rocked. It featured Chinese silk brocade in a vivid sage green—intense but not gaudy. Tiny white and yellow flowers and vines embellished the luxurious cloth, creating a look that was eye-catching yet classic. Never mind that this elegant sack held my cherished offspring—the container itself transformed me from frumpy, sleep-deprived matron into hip and sassy mama.

The exquisite baby carrier replaced my need for real accessories. Most of the time, I threw it on over jeans and a dirty white T-shirt for a quick walk around my San Francisco neighborhood. The silky fabric distracted



onlookers from the ever-present circles of leaking breastmilk that stained my shirts.

I delighted in the attention given not just to my baby but to her carrier. Of course, fellow-mothers often stopped me to ask where I'd found such a lovely thing, but I also got a fair share of compliments from unexpected admirers. The blue-haired barista at the corner coffeehouse regularly cooed at my hipster sling, and the guy who lived above us begged to know where I'd found the fabric. (He needed to score a few yards to make a shirt for his boyfriend.)

My sling bolstered my delicate ego, still floundering in the face of my momentous life transition. It even saved the day on the occasion of a fashion crisis.

When Grace was about eight weeks old, we had plans to attend a wedding. In honor of the affair, and desperate to celebrate my bidding good riddance to maternity clothes, I bought a new skirt and blouse. On the day of the event, already decked out in my new party duds, I sat down in the rocking chair to give Grace a quickie feeding before we left the house. That nursing session triggered a gastrointestinal event of Biblical proportions as Grace experienced one of those nuclear-explosion-style poops. It leaked out of her diaper and all over my new outfit.

Panicked and late, I threw on a stretchy knit skirt and a shapeless, sleeveless sweater, then rushed out the door. I sat in the back row of the church, smoldering with my own self-labeling: Ugly. Frazzled. Envious of the nonmaternal women who filled out their strapless dresses with curvaceous ease.

Later, at the reception, we got out of the car and I placed my sling over my sad ensemble. Grace snuggled inside, and we entered the reception hall.

Something magical happened. Maybe it was my imagination, but I like to think



my fancy green sling transformed me a bit that day. Its shine illuminated my curly red hair, still thick from pregnancy hormones. The fabric disguised the postpartum spare tire that encircled my waist. My cheeks, flushed with the music and chatter, reflected my lustrous silken ornament, and my eyes sparkled with laughter. The whole room stared at me, admiring the beautiful new mother with the gorgeous baby sling.

Although I still sorely missed my expensive wraps and delicate jewelry, I didn't care. I knew that I'd get them all back someday, and that my sling's hour of glory was fleeting. Like the finite nature of babyhood, it was meant to be part of my life for only a precious window of time before it took its turn at the back of my closet.

And, when Grace got a little older, it felt great to finally pull out some of my pre-baby accessories. But somehow, none of them has ever felt as beautiful as my sling.

Robin Dutton-Cookston's musings appear in various publications, including her own parenting 'zine, Apron Strings.

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