

the joy of Babywearing

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Babywearing is the act of wearing or carrying a baby or child in a sling or other form of carrier.

Babies need human contact, to be touched and carried as they develop and grow. Baby carriers are a great tool to help us continue to function in everyday life, whilst providing our babies with human contact.

In most parts of the world, and throughout history, the baby carrier has been an essential piece of baby equipment.

Sadly, the last vestiges of the UK's traditional babywearing culture died out with the massive social changes in the period between the wars, but the Welsh shawl is still remembered by some.

Today babywearing is undergoing a resurgence. From celebrities such as Madonna and Angelina Jolie, to ordinary parents, the joy of babywearing is being rediscovered in the western world.

There are many different baby carriers and slings available, with something suitable for every parent's style. But unfortunately, many parents never discover the carrier(s) that suits them best or how to use them most effectively.

Like any aspect of parenting, babywearing takes a bit of learning to master, but don't be put off by this - it definitely pays off.

The most versatile carriers are sold by small, parent-run companies, who as sling-users themselves can give advice on the best carrier for you and how to use it.

Alternatively the website www.slingmeet.co.uk puts you in touch with local babywearer meet-ups where you can try out other parent's slings, and get advice.

How to choose a sling

All the carriers listed here can do a range of different positions and ages - front, back, hip and newborn to 3 or 4 years.

Success with using them comes down to personal preference, body shape and a little perseverance or help.

Meet other babywearers to try out different carriers and get expert advice at www.slingmeet.co.uk, 0845 862 0073.

Main types of carriers



Tummy to tummy - Kari-me wrap

wrap

Benefits

For you ...

Comfortable

A well chosen baby carrier distributes your child's weight well, allowing you to carry them more easily, for longer periods at a time, and as they get heavier. Most carriers are suitable up to 16kgs, 3 or 4 years.

Freedom of movement

A baby carrier gives you greater freedom to move around than a pram or pushchair. It is easy to move up stairs and through small spaces, making shopping, public toilets, and walking easier.

Hands free

A baby carrier can give you back your hands, allowing you to look after older children, do housework and get on with the things you want to do.

For baby and toddler ...

Less stress

Babies and toddlers are soothed by movement and personal contact. They can determine their own level of interaction with the world and a sling can help a child sleep.

Physical development

The movement associated with being carried develops baby's balance and muscular strength.

Regulates systems

Contact with an adult helps newborns regulate their temperature, breathing, and heartbeat. Kangaroo care is now widely used with premature babies for these very reasons.

Cry less

Babies who are carried more and are responded too quicker have been found to cry less. It can also soothe a toddler's tantrums.

Breastfeeding

You can breastfeed discreetly in a carrier. Some mums find that with practice they can even nurse hands-free.

Communication

A child can see your face, and gets more experience of language, facial expressions and body language.

Stimulates learning

Carried babies spend more time in the quiet alert state required for learning. A babe-in-arms can observe the world and touch, itself, has been found to stimulate the growth of brain cells.

Bonding

The closeness between parent and child in a sling helps bonding. You can get to know each other and learn to communicate and trust each other, whilst carrying on with life.

A wrap is a rectangle of material, wrapped around you and baby and tied. Wraps come in a variety of widths and lengths, and are usually worn over both shoulders.

- ❑ versatile - front, back and hip carries
- ❑ comfortable for long periods and heavier babies or toddlers
- ❑ very adjustable for exact fit and can be used by different sized adults
- ❑ more of a learning curve than some carriers

Stretchy wraps such as the Kari-me and Hug-a-bub are easier with a new born, whereas woven wraps (Girasol, Calin-bleu) are more supportive for a heavier child.



Back carry - Calin Bleu wrap



Cradle carry - Hotslings pouch

pouch

A pouch is a tube of material worn over one shoulder to create a pocket for baby to lie or sit in. Great for new parents and newborns because of their simplicity, but less adjustable.

- ❑ Very easy to learn to use
- ❑ limited adjustability
- ❑ custom fit - pouch needs to fit you, so probably won't fit both parents
- ❑ less comfortable for longer periods or with a heavier child

Non-adjustable pouches include the Brightsparks Coorie Pouch and the Hotslings. Other pouches come with zips or poppers to give more adjustability (Zolowear Adjustable Pouch).



Kangaroo carry - Taylormade

ring sling

A ring sling is a rectangle of material with rings sewn in at one end. Worn over one shoulder it forms a pouch in which baby lies or sits and is adjusted using the rings.

- ❑ versatile
- ❑ very adjustable for exact fit and can be used by different sized adults
- ❑ some learning curve for adjusting using the rings
- ❑ may be less comfortable for longer periods or with a heavier child

Padded ring slings (Huggababy and Better Baby) are easier to learn, but an unpadded ring sling, such as a Taylormade, Natya or Zolowear allows for greater adjustability and more versatility.



Tummy to tummy - Cwtshi

asian baby carrier

An asian baby carrier is a soft carrier with a rectangular body and straps that go over both shoulders. Some have a waist strap and can be fastened by tying straps or by buckles.

- ❑ easy to learn
- ❑ comfortable for long periods or with a heavier child
- ❑ One size can be used by different sized adults
- ❑ great for back carries
- ❑ more suitable for babies with good head control

Covering a wide range of different carriers, the asian baby carriers include the mei-tai (Cwtshi and Ellaroo) with waist straps. More structured related soft pack carriers include the Ergo and Wilkinet.



Tummy to tummy - Zolowear pouch



Hip carry - Natya ring sling



Back carry - Ellaroo Mei Tai

Contacts

Calin-bleu

www.calinbleu.com

Coorie Pouch Sling

www.brightsparkslings.co.uk

Cwtshi www.cwtshi.com

Didymos www.didymos.de

Ellaroo www.ellaroo.com

Ergo

www.ergobabycarrier.com

Girasol www.girasol.de

Hotslings www.hotslings.com

Hug-a-bub www.hugabub.com

Huggababy

www.huggababy.co.uk

Kari-me

www.kari-me-baby-carrier.co.uk

The Maya Wrap Adjustable Pouch www.mayawrap.com

Natya www.natya.co.uk

SlingEasy

www.slingeasyc.co.uk

TaylorMade

www.taylormadeslings.com

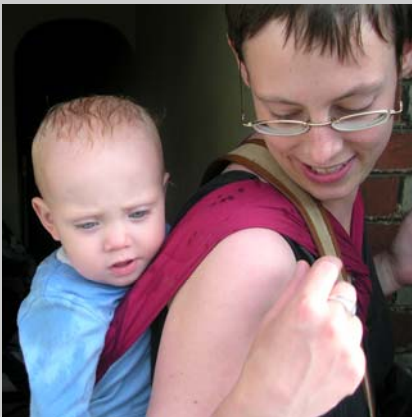
Wilkinet www.wilkinet.co.uk

Zolowear www.zolowear.com

For product and vendor reviews and forums offering advice on choosing and using a baby carrier visit

www.thebabywearer.com

Katherine and Erin's babywearing journey



When I was pregnant I read Deborah Jackson's book *Baby Wisdom* (now out of print) which starts with a look at the modern baby equipment list and just how numerous our expected 'essentials' have become. I wanted a simpler approach and combined with my biologist's belief in the appropriateness of keeping your baby close I chose to forego the travel system and bought myself a ring sling instead. So began my love affair with babywearing and baby carriers - the pleasure of carrying my child and the beauty of many of the carriers themselves has left a lasting impression on me and my life.

I found an incredible freedom in being able to go anywhere, anytime without worrying about lugging around a pushchair, or finding somewhere to breastfeed. It has made negotiating public toilets, escalators and stairs, and rough ground no different to how it was before I had a baby. I have even been able to breastfeed hands-free whilst paying for my shopping in the supermarket!

As Erin has grown older we have appreciated the view of the world a baby carrier provides and even as a toddler the opportunity for a place of rest.

The most wonderful part has been the sharing each moment with my little girl. With her in my arms I have found that I am never alone, there is always someone right by me to talk to, listen to, or watch the world go by with.

Babywearing is one of the most empowering things about being a mum for me. Carrying Erin in a sling has allowed me to do things with a baby that I would probably otherwise have found too overwhelming. From the everyday shopping trips, to a stress-free two day music festival with an eight week old!

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www.slingmeet.co.uk

or call us: 0845-862-0073



Rachel, Poppy and Teddy's babywearing journey

I was a twenty-three-year-old postgrad student when I had my daughter, Poppy, thirteen years ago. I'd had a waterbirth, was breastfeeding and also wanted to carry my baby in a sling - in other words I was regarded as a bit of a hippy. But it was hard to avoid going the mainstream route, as getting hold of anything other than high street baby equipment was nigh on impossible.

We had a pram - a present from my parents - but I went shopping for a sling as soon as I was up and about. In those days there were very few slings around, and even fewer places to buy them from. In fact Mothercare was the only high street shop that sold baby equipment at all, apart from the odd independent nursery shop that sold much the same conventional stuff. So, I bought the only thing on offer at the time - a Mothercare carrier.

I don't remember much about it other than the fact it was turquoise and clipped on, with my daughter dangling at the front. I wore it every time we went out for about the next six weeks. We got many stares and quite a few comments - mainly positive I have to say - and I loved having her close to me. However, the joy was short-lived. The design of the sling threw all the baby's weight on my shoulders and back and, at about two months, Poppy became too heavy to

carry. So we reverted to the pram and the carrier joined the pile of obsolete baby goods - bath thermometer, baby bath stand - in the car boot sale pile at the back of the cupboard. But I never forgot the joy of carrying her, and of being able to kiss her head and hold her close as we did the shopping, caught the bus etc.

Eleven years on, and pregnant with my second child, I knew I wanted another sling. Time had moved on - I'd seen plenty of babies being toted around in Baby Bjorn carriers, and read about Hollywood babies being carried in leather Bill Amberg paposes.

Another major development since Poppy's baby years was the Internet. Via the magic of the Net it was possible to buy baby stuff from somewhere other than Mothercare! I happened to be googling cloth nappies (another great leap forward to the past!) when I was

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directed to a parenting site called UK Parents. I emerged from behind the screen a few hours later with the scales fallen from my eyes!

Parenting had indeed moved on, and there were online communities of mothers sharing advice and experience. I learned was that there were a myriad of slings to choose from - and all of them were a world apart from the Baby Bjorn-type carriers available on the high street.

I joined thebabywearer.com - a website dedicated to (obviously!) babywearing - and learned about different types of sling. When Teddy was born a few months later, he went straight into a Hug-a-Bub - a stretchy wrap, which is basically a long stretchy piece of material that you wrap round you and pop the baby inside. This time the sling was back-friendly, as the design meant that all the baby's weight was held against my body. He was snug and happy. I was comfortable and happy. And what's more, I had two hands free again! Teddy thrived in the sling and was very contented. He cried very little, which I put down to being carried so much.

Now Teddy is 15 months old and still carried in slings. I have a ring sling for quick trips, where he sits cosily on my hip; a couple of mei tais (Asian-style slings) which tie on and are very comfortable for carrying him on my back. We also have an Ergo carrier, which is a bit more structured - it has buckles and padding and looks more like the high street carriers but is designed to make sure the back of both wearer and baby is supported. This is daddy's favourite sling - always in use while mowing the lawn. The last type we have is a woven wrap, which I'm still trying to master. It's a long piece of woven material that can be tied on in many different ways for hip, back and front carries. I think this will be the most versatile, but for me, it's the most

difficult one to learn to use. The others took a few attempts at home before I felt confident with them. But boy, was it worth the effort!

All these slings will last Teddy until he's well into toddlerhood and beyond. We wear our slings out and about and also round the house, so not only is shopping much easier (no buggy to manoeuvre through doors and up steps) but I can cook, vacuum and make a cup of tea with two hands while still carrying the baby! I do have a buggy, an off-road three-wheeler which lives in the boot of the car. To date it's been used about ten times, as I just find the slings handier,

and Teddy hates being strapped into his buggy - he much prefers to be up and about with me, engaged in whatever's going on.

Having your baby snuggled close, with no need to cry to be picked up, is such an addictive feeling. In fact, to feed my love for slings, I go to sling meets, where slinging parents and their children meet up for days out and to try on different types of carriers. Slings have made a big impact on my life as a mother this time round. I've made new friends, have a great bond with my son and my parenting style has changed for the better. Not bad for a simple piece of cloth.