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babywearing is **best** for baby

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| by Christine Gross-Loh

babywearing is best for baby

When you wear your child, everyone wins.
Your little one is content, and you get to parent hands-free!

Babywearing—using slings or other carriers of soft cloth to keep a baby nestled close to a parent or caregiver—has been growing in popularity in recent years. Once an "alternative" and rarely seen practice, babywearing is now much more visible and commonplace. But there's nothing at all new about this ancient practice; mothers have been carrying their babies and keeping them close for millennia. Keeping baby close—and fashioning ways to do so—is the simple manifestation of a biological norm for human infants.

As slings have grown in popularity, larger manufacturers have begun making their own slings to sell in such national chains as Target, Walmart, and Babies "R" Us.

While the growth in babywearing is a positive, there have long been concerns in the babywearing community about the lack of standards for slings, which permitted the sale of slings that were less safe. Of special concern are bag-style slings, which hold a baby low in a pouch with excessive fabric and elastic on the edges, which in turn make it hard to see the baby inside. Babies in these bag-style slings are at risk of falling into a C position, in which the infant's chin is curled to its chest. This position can restrict breathing and put babies at risk of *positional asphyxia*—that is, suffocation caused by the position of the baby's body—especially vulnerable newborns and small infants who can't yet hold up their heads.

RAYE LAW



Baby is being held in an older infant/toddler hip carrier.

People have been babywearing as long as there

— Carole McGranahan, professor

Worn babies cry less, in part because parents are able to recognize and respond quickly to early signals of boredom, distress, hunger, and elimination.

Babywearing also helps babies' cognitive development. When carried, they can potentially spend more time in a state of "quiet alertness" in which they are awake but calm, quietly observing and learning from the world around them.

Opposite page: A newborn snuggles happily in a ring sling.

In the wake of several tragic infant deaths in bag slings, the US Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC) issued a warning about slings on March 12, 2010.[1] Shortly after, on March 24, Infantino recalled one million SlingRider and Wendy Bellissimo bag-style slings in the US.[2,3] Babywearing advocates are helping to shape the resulting public discourse about slings. "We look at the warning as a great way to offer education on safe babywearing," says Glenda Criss-Forshey, president of Babywearing International. "We think the recall is a good thing because we don't want any carriers out there that are unsafe."[4] Criss-Forshey regards the new public conversation as a chance to transmit accurate information about babywearing. Executed correctly, babywearing is not only a safe, time-tested practice—it has many benefits for babies and their parents.

THE BENEFITS OF BABYWEARING

Babies are made to be held close to our bodies. Developmentally immature at birth in comparison to other mammals, human infants' helpless dependence on their parents compels us to keep them near so we can protect and care for them.

When snuggled up to his mother's body immediately after birth, a newborn instantly settles in. He is bathed in sensory bliss: he hears the same voice he heard in utero, is calmed by the same continuous movements of daily life that lulled him to sleep before his birth, and is reassured by his mother's heartbeat and scent. A newborn's limited vision is best suited to seeing his mother's face when he is held in her arms. The primal need for physical closeness continues after birth—babywearing is a natural extension of postnatal skin-to-skin contact, and continues to facilitate the bonding of parent and child.

Babywearing assists infants as they make a gradual transition from life inside the womb to the world outside. Ashley Montagu, author of *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin*, famously wrote of not nine but 18 months of human gestation: nine months in the womb, followed by nine months of "exterogestation" outside the womb, always in close physical proximity to a caregiver who can respond quickly to a baby's needs, until the baby reaches the stage of mobility and is naturally more interested in and capable of exploring the environment around him.[5] And James McKenna, Edmund P. Joyce Chair in Anthropology and director of the Mother-Baby Behavioral Sleep Laboratory at the University of Notre Dame, states, "Cultures that carry their babies—kind of integrating them into their daily activities—sleep close, and breastfeed have some of the healthiest babies in the world."[6]

Babywearing also helps babies' cognitive development. When carried, they can potentially spend more time in a state of "quiet alertness" in which they are awake but calm, quietly observing and learning from the world around them. When worn up high, where all the action is, babies can watch interactions among people and themselves, and become part of numerous conversations and encounters. McKenna elaborates: "You can't get a richer intellectual environment. The greatest school you can go to is when you are in the context of being carried by your mother and engaged with her social activities during the day. Carried babies are able to orient and direct their gaze at interactional moments that are very important, and provide opportunities for them to learn about human turn-taking and social interactions. This fulfills every optimal brain need that babies have."

Parents, too, learn so much about their babies when they wear them. They are able to go about their daily activities while at the same time being able to talk to, touch, and be responsive to subtle cues their babies may show. "The more [mothers and babies] have access to each other,

have been people.

OF ANTHROPOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO



STEPHENIE DAME

the more they want each other," notes McKenna. "It strengthens attachment and all the good things that go along with it." Worn babies cry less, in part because parents are able to recognize and respond quickly to early signals of boredom, distress, hunger, and elimination. This builds parental confidence, and deepens the feeling of trust between baby and parent.

Babywearing also helps protect an infant's health. Extensive use of car seats, bouncy seats, and swings are all associated with *positional plagiocephaly*, a condition in which an infant's head becomes misshapen from too much time spent lying on the back.[7,8] A baby who spends ample time in his caregiver's arms is unlikely to spend the excessive amounts of time on hard surfaces that may lead to this condition. Car seats are also associated with oxygen desaturation in full-term infants, according to a recent study in *Pediatrics*, and parents are advised to use car seats only for their intended use—when a baby is traveling in a car—and not as a baby carrier or makeshift bassinet.[9] According to a *ConsumerReports.org* Safety Blog post citing recent research by Shital N. Parikh, MD, of the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, "between 2003 and 2007, more than 43,000 infants in the US required emergency-room care after falling in car seats that were improperly placed on tables, counters, and other elevated surfaces" or after the child fell out of the car seat altogether, either while being carried in it or after the car seat was placed on an elevated surface.[10]

In addition, being carried in an upright or semi-upright position helps babies develop head and neck control. When babies are completely supported in a car seat or other hard piece of baby gear and don't have the opportunity to use their own neck muscles, it's more likely that they won't be able to lift their necks out of dangerous breathing positions, says McKenna.

THE WORLDWIDE HISTORY OF BABYWEARING

With all these benefits, it's no surprise that babywearing has enjoyed a long history. Carole McGranahan, a professor of anthropology at the University of Colorado who is leading a research project on babywearing, says, "Based on what we know about the lives of our human ancestors and the way that a mother's body is designed to regulate an infant's, anthropologists believe that human beings evolved carrying and being carried. Based on that, we would say that people have been babywearing as long as there have been people." She continues, "Parents around the world have always fashioned baby carriers from what they have on hand: cloth, reeds, fibers, skins, and so on. The earliest baby carriers would have been made out of bark or other natural materials before the advent of weaving, after which carriers could have been made from cloth."[11] (See sidebar, "Carry Me! in 8 Languages.")

Baby carriers all around the world share several characteris-

Cultures that carry their babies, sleep close, and some of the healthiest babies in the world.

—James McKenna, director of the University of Notre

Babywearing is a natural extension of postnatal skin-to-skin contact, and continues to facilitate the bonding of parent and child.

tics. They're usually made from a simple piece of cloth, with or without straps, that is folded and tied to secure a baby snugly to the mother's body so she can work. McKenna elaborates: "Very early in our evolution, humans constructed some artificial tools to help them accommodate these very undeveloped babies that couldn't cling to their mothers' chests. Mothers had a particular challenge—how to maintain their daily activities, their foraging and acquisition of food for the family. So perhaps one of the first tools ever invented, even before weapons, was some cloth or resource that could assist the mother in keeping her baby with her." And this has continued to modern times, says Glenda Criss-Forshey: "You always see pictures of women with children on their backs so they could get work done." To be worn properly and safely, a young baby is usually high and close. The carries—the positions in which babies are held—of different baby carriers usually mimic a comfortable, natural back-carrying or in-arms position.

All of these traditional carriers are available in one form or another to modern parents. The Asian-inspired carriers (*mei tai, podaegi, onbuhimo*) evolved into modern soft-structured carriers, while simple piece-of-cloth styles either became wraps or evolved into ring slings

Carry me! in 8 languages



ISTOCK PHOTOS

Here is an anything-but-exhaustive list of examples of baby carriers from across the globe. To see photos of each carrier, go to *www.mothering.com/links* or, in our digital edition, just click on the names of the carriers below.

- **The traditional carrier of the Inuit, the *amauti***, is a carrier and coat all in one. A back pouch is created when mom cinches a cord at her waist. The baby is held high on the mother's back while snuggling in the pouch of this fur-lined coat.
- **The Japanese *dakkohimo* or *onbuhimo***, a simple carrier of cloth and straps that go over the shoulders, allows parents, older siblings, or grandparents to carry a baby on the back or front. Babywearing is still very popular in Japan; a number of modern innovations on the traditional Japanese carrier are available.
- **The Korean *podaegi*** is a traditional carrier that looks like a blanket with straps. Babies and toddlers are worn snugly and cozily on the back.
- **The baby carrier of the Hmong people, the *nyias***, is a panel with straps that wrap around the mother to keep baby on the back. According to the Wisconsin Historical Society, "these carriers are given to brides by their mothers to promote the birth of many children. …In order to protect a baby's soul…the baby carrier is designed with protective features. …Tufts of yarn are meant to disguise the carrier and baby as a flower."[1]
- **The Kenyan *kanga*** is simply a large, rectangular piece of cloth wrapped around baby and mother to secure baby to her back.
- **The Chinese *mei tai*** is a fabric panel with four straps, one at each corner. The bottom two straps go around the mother's waist; the upper two straps go over the shoulders to crisscross in back (if baby is worn on the front of the body) or in front (if baby is worn on the back). Baby's bottom, back, and neck are supported by the panel. Western versions of mei tais are especially popular with fathers.
- **The Indonesian *selendang***, a long rectangle of batik cloth, is commonly tucked and folded to form a sling.
- **The Mexican *rebozo*** is a cotton or cotton/rayon shawl that is knotted to form a sling.

—Christine Gross-Loh

1. "Baby Carrier," in the exhibit *Person to Person: Communicating Identity Through Wisconsin Folk Objects*, Wisconsin Historical Museum: *www.wisconsinhistory.org/museum/exhibits/p2p/red/baby_carrier.asp.*

in the 1960s. The explosion of carrier choices and the growing popularity of babywearing mean that parents are likely to be able to find a carrier that will suit them, their babies, and their individual needs.

BABYWEARING IS PRACTICAL

Many parents report that babywearing is convenient and practical. A contented baby on the back leaves a parent free to tend to household chores or care for older siblings, take public transportation, or move through a busy mall or airport. Babywearing helps new parents navigate the newborn stage—babies are often so happy while being worn that it's easy for parents to go about their normal daily activities. It also allows a parent to be responsive to the child. The positive cycle of increased parental responsiveness leading to increased baby contentment can provide the boost in confidence a new parent needs. Ziva Mann, a mother who lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, says that "Having my hands free fed into my sense of competence as a parent, oddly enough, because it's easier to do things with two hands! I was able to hold a big brother's hand, or a cup. So I got more done, and did it more easily and quickly. Having my son up close meant that I caught the small, early signs of his needs and responded faster. He was a happier baby, I was a happier mama. So simple, and yet so significant."

Parents can even find time for themselves while babywearing: Monica Waggoner, who has two sons and lives in Los Angeles, says, "With a baby on my back, I can walk and read at the same time. With a stroller, you have at least one, and probably *two* hands occupied."

Babywearing empowers growing families. Elizabeth Parise, a mom of six from Concord, Massachusetts, reports, "Babywearing has helped me take care of my children and keep them happy while allowing me to continue doing what I needed to do. I remember being so frustrated as a new, 21-year-old mother, because life didn't continue on the way I thought it would after my son was born. Since then, I've found that the more I've carried my babies in carriers, the more I've been able to continue with working, socializing, or running errands



Stretchy wraps are wonderful for cuddly hugs.

STEPHENIE DAME

I love the fact that I can bake a cake with my toddler with my baby on my back, knowing that my baby is safe and that both my children are happy.

—Sophie Messager, babywearing mother of two

and doing chores." And Sophie Messager, a babywearing mom of two from the UK, says that "With a sling, it's easier to meet the needs of an older child while still caring for your baby. The baby is in the movement of life and follows its parent's day. I love the fact that I can bake a cake with my toddler with my baby on my back, knowing that my baby is safe and that both my children are happy."

Because baby carriers were designed to be able to be shared among caregivers, says Carole McGranahan, they're ideal for helping fathers, partners, and others to share in a significant aspect of baby care and bond with the babies. They're particularly useful for non-nursing partners when they spend time with their little ones. Dan Baker, the husband of Laura Hamilton, a babywearing mom of two boys who lives in the San Francisco Bay area and owns The Portable Baby (*www.theportablebaby.com*), notes, "When our children were babies, babywearing was often the only way to calm them down. I would put the baby in a carrier and go for a walk. That was usually the only way that I could get the baby down for a nap without mama." Sarah Gillett and Beth Wheat, parents of ten-month-old Anne, have different body types and found that each preferred a different style of carrier. "When Anne was first born, Beth, who is quite a bit shorter than I am, used a long wrap and held her close to put her to sleep and for taking her on walks," says Gillett. "I didn't use the wrap very often because I didn't like how long it took to wrap around me, so I often used a soft-structured carrier." Individual preferences are one of the reasons we are fortunate to have access to so many different types of baby carriers.

To learn more about different carriers and how to wear babies properly and safely, nothing beats an in-person babywearing tutorial from an experienced babywearing parent or expert.

WHICH CARRIER IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

The plethora of choices enables parents to choose carriers for different purposes: one type for the newborn phase, another for older infancy or toddlerhood, one for errands or long walks, another for lulling baby to sleep—and, of course, some that are just all-around workhorses. With so many carriers available, how do you decide which is right for you?

While there are many different brands out there, most fall into one of several basic types:

Pouch Slings can be made of fleece, cotton, or other material. Some adjustable pouches are available, while others come in a fixed size. Generally, you need to get a good fit to wear these correctly; when ordering, measure carefully.

Ring Slings are adjustable slings, with one end threaded through two rings. They can be padded or unpadded, and have closed or open tails. Ring slings offer considerable versatility: Baby can be in a cradle hold, facing in or on the hip. Baby should be carried high up on the body for comfort as well as safety. Both pouch and ring slings offer the advantage of "poppability": baby can be very quickly put in or taken out of the sling.

Asian-Style Carriers are *mei tais, podaegis, onbuhimos*, and other types inspired by the traditional carriers of Asia that comprise a cloth-panel body secured with tie-on straps.

Soft-Structured Carriers are buckle-and-go. Because they're worn over both shoulders, your hands are left free. Weight is also supported on the hips, which relieves the pressure on your shoulders and back. Babies can be carried on the back or the front.

Wraps are long pieces of cloth. There are many varieties, some made from material with some stretch, others from woven material with a bit of grip. It takes a little while to learn the various carries, but there is plenty of information out there from devoted wearers who love the versatility of wraps. (See "For More Information" at end of article.)

With some experimentation, you can figure out which carriers work best for you at different stages (newborn, infant, toddler) or for different

Opposite: Soft-structured carriers make shopping fun and easy.



LAURA SIEBERT



situations (at home, while shopping or doing errands, on hikes or long walks, during warm weather or cold, etc.). One example might be a pouch, ring sling, or wrap for the newborn stage; a soft-structured carrier or mei tai on the back once baby can hold up her head and throughout toddlerhood; and then, once again, a pouch for wearing your baby on your hip during toddlerhood, when she'll be frequently in and out of your arms. And babies have their own preferences, which they'll make known. Learn a variety of carries for your carriers, and come back to each carry and/or carrier later on if, at one stage or another, it doesn't seem to work; it may appeal to baby later on.

To learn more about different carriers and how to wear babies properly and safely, nothing beats an in-person babywearing tutorial from an experienced babywearing parent or expert. E. Naomi Sandoval, a mom of two, a teacher of babywearing, and owner of SoBeBabies (*www.sobebabies.com*), says, "I teach and recommend all safe baby carriers so everyone can decide for themselves. There is no 'best,' just what's

Above: Ring slings offer versatility. Note the difference in the ways the babies are being held in this ring sling and in the one on page 47.

what the expert

M'Liss Stelzer is a leading expert on the medical benefits of babywearing, and well known for her research into the importance of correct positioning and how it affects the breathing of newborns. An internationally known babywearing educator, Stelzer was one of the first to warn, in 2006, about the dangers of positional asphyxia in bag slings. She wrote "Wear Your Baby Right" and "Babywearing Bliss" for the Baby-Carrier Special issue of *Mothering*, no. 140 (January–February 2007).

Stelzer, a registered nurse, now stays at home with her two terrific children, her chickens, and her garden. Her blog on bag-style slings can be found at *www.babyslingsafety.blogspot.com*.

Christine Gross-Loh: Can you tell me a few basic, easy-to-remember guidelines for people to keep in mind when it comes to babywearing safety?

M'Liss Stelzer: When babywearing, it makes sense to mimic an in-arms carry. If a parent can put his or her arms around the baby and hold her in an in-arms carry, and then get the carrier to mimic the same position, the baby will be in the right position and so much happier. This is safest for her and most comfortable for you. The problem with poorly designed slings, such as bag slings, is that they don't allow you to hold the baby the way you would naturally hold her in your arms.

When the baby is in a sling or carrier, make sure nothing is over her face and that you can see her clearly; make sure baby isn't rolled in toward you; and make sure that the carrier isn't hanging too low.

If you're using a cradle carry (seated reclining position), it should be very close to an in-arms carry. If you use a tummy-to-chest position, you want the baby as well supported as if you were holding her on your chest while lying down.

CGL: Why is the C-shape (chin-to-chest) position so dangerous?

MS: A C shape, with the chin curled to the chest, compresses the airway and can compromise breathing. Again, it's important to always think "in-arms carry" when using a baby carrier, and carrying a newborn balled up is not a natural position. Think about how a parent naturally carries a baby. In a cradle carry the baby is supported by the parent's arm with the head tilted over the arm so the airway is open. In a tummy-to-chest posi-

PHOTO BY STEPHENIE DAME; SLING PROVIDED BY METROMINIS.COM

says an interview with M'Liss Stelzer

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY M'LISS STELZER

tion the infant is supported, with back straight. Mimicking in-arms positioning naturally opens the baby's airway.

CGL: What are signs of respiratory difficulty in babies?

MS: There might be fussiness or restlessness—because some babies will fuss to get out of a sling when they're not breathing comfortably. However, it is not true that every baby will tell you if she is uncomfortable. Many babies are just too sleepy, too new to breathing, and too immature to protest. Parents should observe their baby for labored or rapid breathing, as well as for grunting or soft sighing or squeaking with *every* breath. That's how you can tell the difference between normal baby noises and respiratory distress—the noises happen with every breath.

CGL: From a safety standpoint, what kind of baby carrier do you prefer, and why?

MS: Of course, a carrier that swaddles an infant in an in-arms position and supports a newborn's head, and yet leaves the head free of fabric.

The particular type of fabric carrier I find most popular with parents new to babywearing is a mei tai. It can be comfortably used with babies from newborn to toddler, it places the infant in a supported tummy-to-chest carry (easier to get right than a cradle carry), and most parents find a mei tai very easy to use.

When choosing a pouch for a newborn, look for one that's not overly deep, comes in lots of sizes to guarantee a good fit, and has a padded rail that, for a newborn, keeps the sling tented up so fabric doesn't collapse onto baby's face.

In addition to mei tais and pouches, open-tailed ring slings can be used to swaddle your infant in a reclining or upright position. Search *www.thebabywearer.com* to be overwhelmed by beautiful options in cotton, silk, linen, and even organic fabrics.

For wraps, I prefer breathable, thin fabrics. Some babies do like to burrow into fabric, so I really emphasize breathability when looking for a carrier for a newborn. There are some hybrid stretchy wraps and thinner woven wraps that are good and supportive enough for an older child, yet soft, breathable, and super-snuggly for a tiny newborn.



Above: M'Liss Stelzer and her kids, Jacob (5) and Abby (7), demonstrating a great way to wear an older child.

Right: Photo from back in the day when M'Liss could wear both of her children at the same time.

CGL: Some parents I talk to say they can't use a baby carrier because it hurts their back or shoulder. What advice do you have for parents in search of the right carrier for them?

MS: Swaddling the baby to the parent's body in a natural carrying position puts his weight close to the parent's body and uses the parent's babywearing muscles. Avoid carriers with thin straps, and/or carriers that dangle the infant away from the parent's body.

Check the positioning of your carrier by putting your arms around the baby in the carrier and "holding" him in your arms. If doing this lifts the baby and/or significantly changes his position, then the carrier is being worn incorrectly.

I encourage moms with back pain to use a poppable carrier—like a ring sling, pouch, or pre-tied wrap—around the house or for quick errands. Any time you need to pop baby in, you can do so and let the carrier, instead of your arms, carry him. For longer outings at the mall or for hikes, have a good two-shoulder carrier that distributes the baby's weight across your hips—a soft-structured carrier, wrap, or mei tai.

If you have back problems and you carry your child only in your arms, it will make things worse. When carrying your baby in a baby carrier, remember always to stand up straight so you don't throw your back out of alignment. Keep the material spread wide across your back so it doesn't hit any pressure points.

For moms with severe back problems, it's helpful to go to a babywearing meeting so you can try lots of options, or buy from a reputable vendor who will take the time to help you troubleshoot any problems.

We're made to carry babies. When your baby is at the right level, your carrying muscles will engage. If you do it naturally and correctly, then you shouldn't be in any pain.



We have been clamoring unsafe slings out there.

best for you at this particular time."[12] Local babywearing groups can be found on *Mothering.com* or the Babywearer forums (*www.thebabywearer.com*), as well as on the websites of Granola Babies (*www.granolababies.com*) and Sakura Bloom (*www.sakurabloom.com*). Babywearing International expects to have a group affiliation program, with local chapters led by certified Volunteer Babywearing Educators, ready for its US launch by the end of 2010 (see *www.babywearinginternational.com*). And for a more in-depth discussion of baby-carrier types, see the *Mothering* reprint *Babywearing 101*.

SAFE BABYWEARING

With the CPSC warning, and the recall of Infantino's SlingRider and Wendy Bellissimo carriers in March 2010, there has been widespread concern that babywearing as a whole might be considered unsafe. According to Alma Gordillo, treasurer for Babywearing International and *Mothering.com*'s Babywearing Community Moderator, parents have reported that, when wearing their babies, they have been cautioned by concerned relatives, friends, and even strangers. Gordillo says that experienced babywearers aren't particularly concerned, however. "We're all old-school babywearers; most of us have been to [La Leche League] meetings or babywearing meetings, and we're attached moms who understand how to do it; all this hasn't affected us as much as those around us."[13] But it would be unfortunate if new or inexperienced parents were to be discouraged from enjoying the benefits of babywearing by misrepresentations of the risks.

LAURA SIEBERT. SLING PROVIDED BY HOTSLINGS.

for standards for a while; we knew there were some
We are happy someone finally paid attention. . . .

—Alma Gordillo, treasurer, Babywearing International, and *Mothering.com*'s Babywearing Community Moderator

Standards for slings have been talked about for a few years now. Several sling manufacturers, including Hotslings, Zolowear, Ellaroo, and Maya Wrap, concerned about the appearance in the market of unsafe slings, first approached the Juvenile Products Manufacturers' Association (JPMA) in 2007 to ask them to create standards for slings.[14] Subsequently, ASTM International (formerly the American Society for Testing and Materials), an internationally recognized creator of standards for consumer products, created a subcommittee for Sling Carrier Standards, which began writing the standard two years ago. "We have been clamoring for standards for a while; we knew there were some unsafe slings out there," says Gordillo. "We are happy someone finally paid attention to the fact that there are unsafe slings and something has to be done about them."

Kristen DeRocha, owner of Hotslings (*www.hotslings.com*) and chairperson of the ASTM International Sling Carrier Standards subcommittee, agrees. "We had our first ASTM standards meeting in 2007. At the time, we were advised by the people who had written standards for soft-structured carriers that the process would take up to four years to complete. We were surprised because we all owned and managed these quick, small, agile companies, and we can get change out really fast. We didn't realize this was a bureaucratic process that would take longer."[15] The committee is working to complete a draft standard by fall 2010.

DeRocha has been involved in educating her customers about babywearing safety for a long time. "Ever since we became aware of positional asphyxia, we immediately started to warn our customers about the chin-to-chest position—it's in all our materials and in our instructional booklet. And we recently issued a press release and a statement to our retailers saying we stand behind the CPSC, because we truly do. We want good products out there."

DeRocha has witnessed a dramatic rise of babywearing in the last several years. In 2006, she was one of two sling vendors at the JPMA trade show, but she soon observed that slings had become must-have items that are now part of the standard product array at major baby-goods stores.

Jane McClintock is the owner of online baby-carrier distributor QuirkyBaby (*www.quirkybaby.com*) and founder of the Facebook Babywearing Safety Page, a widely accessible, interactive resource for information. "I started [the page] to take advantage of the power of social media—and its ability to bring together a virtual community of babywearers with photos, videos, links, and resources—to get the word out not only about the dangers of bag-style carriers, but also to raise awareness of safe-positioning rules in well-designed carriers," she says. "In all the excitement of researching the ideal carrier, the safety message can get lost. Parents need to know that their responsibility doesn't end at choosing a great baby carrier—they also have to know how to use it properly, especially with tiny babies.

"Manufacturers of slings and carriers have an enormous responsibility to design safe products," McClintock continues, "and both they and retailers have another huge responsibility: to educate parents on how to use them correctly. But at the end of the day, the parent is the only one who can protect her baby, not only by choosing a well-designed baby sling or carrier, but also by learning to use it correctly, by following safe-positioning guidelines, and by staying alert to her baby's physical well-being."[16]

Local babywearing groups can be found on *Mothering.com* or the Babywearer forums (*www.thebabywearer.com*).

For a more in-depth discussion of baby-carrier types, see the *Mothering* reprint *Babywearing 101*.

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1. US Consumer Product Safety Commission, "Infant Deaths Prompt CPSC Warning about Sling Carriers for Babies," press release (12 March 2010): *www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prerel/prhtml10/10165.html*.

2. Infantino LLC, "Infantino Announces Free Replacement of

Opposite:
This pouch holds baby close while offering him a view of the world.

SlingRider and Wendy Bellissimo Baby Carriers," press release (24 March 2010): *www.infantino.com/CustomerSupport/SlingRiderStatement.php*.

3. US Consumer Product Safety Commission, "Infantino Recalls to Replace SlingRider Baby Slings; Three Infant Deaths Reported," *News from CPSC and HC* (24 March 2010): *www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prerel/prhtml10/10177.html*.

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7. T. R. Littlefield, K. M. Kelly, J. L. Reiff, and J. K. Pomatto, "Car Seats, Infant Carriers, and Swings: Their Role in Deformational Plagiocephaly," *Journal of Prosthetics and Orthotics* 15, no. 3 (2003): 102–106; *www.plagiocephaly.info/resources/pdf/jpo2003.pdf*.

8. John Persing, MD, et al., American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Practice and Ambulatory Medicine, Section on Plastic Surgery and Section on Neurological Surgery, "Prevention and Management of Positional Skull Deformities in Infants," *Pediatrics* 112, no. 1, part 1 (July 2003): 199–202.

9. L. K. Cerar et al., "A Comparison of Respiratory Patterns in Healthy Term Infants Placed in Car Safety Seats and Beds," *Pediatrics* 124, no. 3 (September 2009): e396–e402.

10. "Seats That Keep Babies Safe in the Car Can Pose a Hazard Outside the Vehicle," *Consumer Reports.org* Safety Blog (23 October 2009); *http://blogs.consumerreports.org/safety/2009/10/seats-that-keep-babies-safe-in-the-car-can-pose-a-hazard-outside-the-vehicle.html*.

11. This and subsequent quotations: personal communication (26 March 2010).

12. Personal communication (11 March 2010).

13. This and subsequent quotations: personal communication (23 March 2010).

14. Hotslings, Maya Wrap, Moby Wrap, Wrapsody, Gypsymama, TogetherBe, Kangaroo Korner, Taylormade Slings, Scootababy, Bellala Baby, Catbird Baby, SlingEZee, ZoloWear, HAVA, SlingRings, and Sakura Bloom, "Not All Slings Are Created Equally: Baby Sling & Carrier Manufacturers Speak Out on Baby Sling Safety Warning," press release (11 March 2010): *www.prweb.com/releases/2010/03/prweb3718984.htm*.

15. This and subsequent quotations: personal communication (23 March 2010).

16. Personal communication (26–31 March 2010).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Babywearing International, "CPSC and Infant Sling Safety," *http://babywearinginternational.org/pages/InfantSlingSafety.php*

Babywearing 101: a *Mothering* magazine reprint: *www.mothering.com/green-living/babywearing-101*

Babywearing Safety Page on Facebook: *www.facebook.com/BabywearingSafety*

M'Liss Stelzer, "Correct Positioning for the Safety & Comfort of Your Newborn," *TheBabywearer.com* (September 2006): *www.thebabywearer.com/articles/HowTo/CorrectPositioning.htm*

UK Sling Manufacturers and Retailers Consortium, "Baby Sling Safety," *www.babyslingsafe.com*

For more facts about wearing your baby, go to *www.mothering.com/links* and find "*Mothering* Special Report—Babywearing" and our how-to babywearing video, as well as the past article "Hold Me Close," by Christine Gross-Loh, and the Web exclusive "Slings," by Joylyn Fowler.



Christine Gross-Loh is mother to two sons and two daughters. She is involved with the nonprofit organization DiaperFreeBaby, blogs about family living at www.origamimommy.org, *and is the author of* The Diaper-Free Baby: The Natural Toilet Training Alternative *(HarperCollins, 2007). She and her family divide their time between Tokyo, Japan, and Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

a guide to **safe babywearing**

1. **Choose a carrier that mimics the baby's preferred in-arms carry.** Doing so will ensure that baby is happy, safe positioning is achieved, and the parent's back won't hurt.
2. **Make sure you choose a sling or carrier that keeps your baby's face in view at all times.** Don't let fabric cover baby's face.
3. **Be sure baby is *not* curled in a chin-to-chest position** (there should always be one finger-width of space under baby's chin), or rolled toward your body. Either position can compromise breathing.
4. **Learn about the upright, tummy-to-chest position for newborns;** it's safer, and most babies prefer this hold. (For more information, see M'Liss Stelzer's article "Correct Positioning" at *www.thebabywearer.com/articles/HowTo/CorrectPositioning.htm*.)
5. **When baby is semi-reclined, position her face upward.** In a tummy-to-chest carry, position baby with her head turned to the side, not burrowed into the parent's chest. As already stated, keep baby's face free from fabric and visible at all times.
6. **Reposition baby immediately if you detect any sign of respiratory difficulty**, including: rapid or labored breathing, grunting, sighing, or squeaking with *every* breath, or restlessness.
7. **Do not allow baby to fall asleep while nursing in a carrier**—suffocation could result from his face pressed against the breast. If baby falls asleep on the breast, gently and safely delatch and reposition him safely following the guidelines above.

—Christine Gross-Loh, M'Liss Stelzer, and Jane McClintock

For a helpful visual aid, be sure to check the babywearing video at Mothering.com/links.

BABYWEARING resources

A Small Green Footprint
www.asmallgreenfootprint.com

Attached to Baby
www.attachedtobaby.com

BabyHawk
www.babyhawk.com

Baby So Smart
www.babysosmart.com

BabyTrekker
www.babytrekker.com

BabyWearing Institute
www.babywearingschool.com

Balboa Baby
www.balboababy.com

BeByBaby!
www.bebybaby.com

Beco Baby Carrier
www.becobabycarrier.com

Birdie's Room
www.birdiesroom.com

Boba Baby Carrier
www.bobababycarrier.com

Breyla.com
www.breyla.com

ByNature.ca
www.bynature.ca

Chic Papoose
www.chicpapoose.com

ChildCarriers.com
www.childcarriers.com

Didymos
www.didymos.de/english/index.php

EcoBaby Canada
www.ecobabycanada.com

EcoPolitan
www.eco-politan.com

Ergo Baby Carrier
www.ergobabycarrier.com

Granola Babies
www.granolababies.com

Happy Bambino
www.happybambino.com

Hip Mountain Mama
www.hipmountainmama.com

Hotslings
www.hotslings.com

Karma Baby
www.mykarmababy.com

Kelly's Closet
www.kellyscloset.com

Kozy Carrier
http://kozycarrier.homestead.com

Lil Bugger
www.lilbugger.biz

Líllébaby
www.lillebaby.com

Little for Now
www.littlefornow.com

Lucky Baby
www.lucky-baby.com

Mamaponcho
www.mamaponcho.ch

Mamma's Milk
www.mammasmilk.com

Maya Wrap
www.mayawrap.com

Metro Minis
www.metrominis.com

Milagros Boutique
www.milagrosboutique.com

Moby Wrap
www.mobywrap.com

New Native
www.newnativeinc.com

NurtureCenter.com
www.nurturecenter.com

Olives & Applesauce
www.olivesandapplesauce.com

Over the Shoulder Baby Holder
www.babyholder.com

Parenting Concepts
www.parentingconcepts.com

Peekaru
www.togetherbe.com

QuirkyBaby
www.quirkybaby.com

Sakura Bloom
www.sakurabloom.com

Sleepy Wrap
www.sleepywrap.com

Slinglings
www.slinglings.com

SlingRings
www.slingrings.com

Sprout Soup
www.sproutsoup.com

Storchenwiege
www.storchenwiege.com

Stork Organic Baby Boutique
www.storkorganicbaby.com

Suse's Kinder
www.suseskinder.com

Sutemi Gear
www.sutemigear.com



STEPHENIE DAME

Hanging out with Mom and Dad in mei teis.

SweetBaby Sling
http://sweetbabysling.com

Sweet Pickles
www.sweet-pickles.com

Thanks Mama
www.thanksmama.com

Togetherbe
www.togetherbe.com

UhBoohBahBaby
www.uhboohbahbaby.com

UrthChild
www.urthchild.com

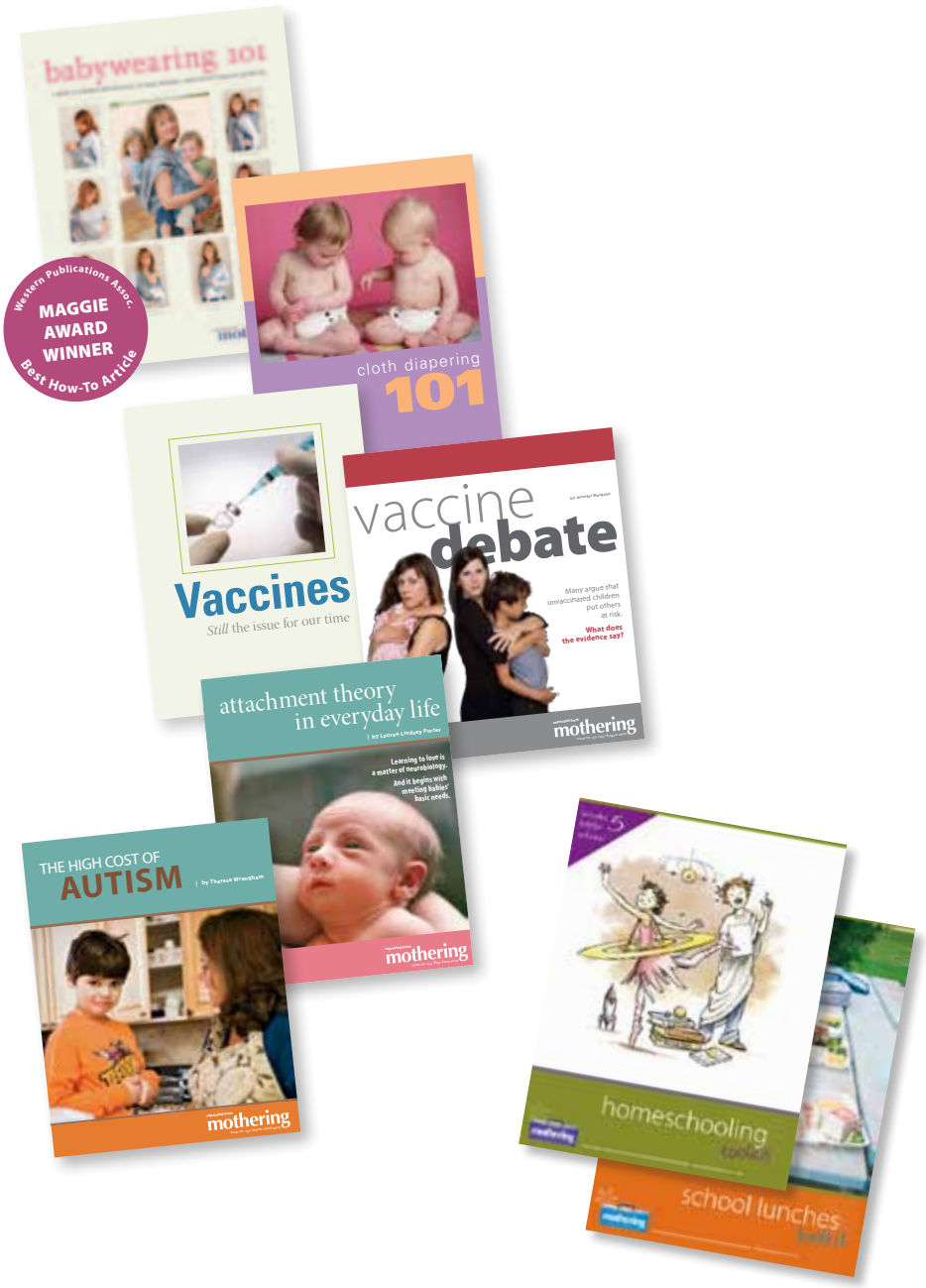
Wallababy
www.wallababy.com

Wee Ones
www.weeones.biz

Wrapsody
www.gypsymama.com

Wrap Your Baby
www.wrapyourbaby.com

ZoloWear
http://zolowear.com



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