

# Carrying of infants and small children

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As a paediatrician with more than 30 years of clinical experience I can fully support the findings of E.Kirkilionis (article in issue 3/98 of this publication). The opponents of carrying devices stereotypically warn about damage to the spine, compression of the body and shortness of breath when carrying. These fears, for which no evidence could ever be provided, are unreasonable.

The general development of the carried infant is influenced positively

Advantages of a correct carrying device are:

- the child feels the body warmth of the mother/father
- it feels his/her heart beat
- it is aware of his/her bodily smell
- it feels and hears the voice (with its ear on the chest of the carrier)
- it is completely enclosed and therefore feels safe
- it can burp easily (without spills)
- its digestion is stimulated („tummy massage“) and
- it can more easily empty its bowels.

When walking (hiking) and at work (in the field or in the garden) the sequence of movements is always rhythmical. After a while that has the effect that the frequency of the breath, the pace and heart beat of the carrier have a single figure relationship to each other (findings in sports medicine). For the carrier this results in harmony in the psycho-vegetative field.

The child can smell and feel this ( a relaxed person smells differently). The rhythmical movement also makes the child more relaxed and it can for instance fall asleep or digest its food more easily. The acupuncture points against problems of digestion or sleep, which are located on the belly and on the lower insides of the thighs, are automatically massaged.

The carrying device evenly supports the child's body

This kind of carrying resembles the „carrying“ inside the womb (enclosing, comfort, warmth etc.). Nothing is too tight or too loose. In the same way as the mother's walking during her pregnancy did not have any detrimental effect on the spine of the child, so being carried in a baby sling does not disadvantage its spine either. Those who take the opposite view should also prevent children from walking, running, jumping, skipping and dancing, because all this causes regular impact on the spine.

Quite the contrary,; this regular loading and unloading on the spine and hip joints greatly increases the growth stimulus. We have not yet seen any healthy child that has been carried from the very beginning which developed a hip dysplasia or scoliosis. We have however seen many „pram children“ (who lie on their backs) who have deformed skulls (flattened on the back or sides), with deformed bodies, hip dysplasia, and children who lie on their fronts with „frog-positions“ of the legs and feet. Apart from this „front lying) children are more endangered by bad air at the deepest point of the pram and by accumulated heat, because their palms can not sweat and so create cold by evaporation.

The movement of the mother promotes development of the child

Developmental neurologists have discovered, that when a woman has to lie for a long time during her pregnancy it has a negative effect on the general development of her child. Conversely, the child of a mother who moves every day while pregnant shows clear developmental advantages.

This is the same with carried = held children and not carried = not held children. The carried child develops greater physical strength (statomotor development, vestibular abilities =

balance, skeleton including cartilage, tendons and connective tissue), greater nerve strength (co-ordination, , sensory awareness and digestion), greater psychological strength (self assurance, frustration tolerance, deep trust, creativity) and greater social strength ( ability to integrate). When I meet a 1.5 to 2 year old child for the first time, I have a good idea as to whether the child has been carried during its first year of life or not.

Psychological aspects are also part of considering the pros and cons of carrying

- The child in the baby sling is „near“ to me.
- The child in the pram is „far“ away.
- Women form the majority of supporters of the carrying device
- Its opponents are mainly men.
- Families with only one child use carrying devices less than families with several children.
- The child that is carried at the same height either in a baby sling or carrying bag has equality
- The child in a pram has less equality: I look down on it.

(This is similar when treating women during childbirth: if the mother giving birth lies on a bed, she is far from me, inferior and does not seem equal. If the woman gives birth in an upright position „crouching“ and I crouch in front of her in order to receive the child, she is near, of equal rank and equal rights)

There are also critical aspects that must be considered:

- Some carrying devices do not allow the child to sit in the physiologically correct position on the hip or stomach of the mother/father.
- Some parents carry their child almost continuously. But the child as well as the parents needs times of rest and distance.
- The weight of the child strains the body of the carrier (muscles, tendons, spine).
- Therefore it is a good idea to carry the child regularly from the very beginning in order to build up strength.
- Beware of severe cold. I can remember a „steaming“ father who trudged uphill in snow

and the child on his back had icy cold legs.

- The fabric of carrying devices can contain formaldehyde („easy care“) or other dangerous chemicals (study the labels).

The pram also has its disadvantages

- It is an unnatural means of transport, the child is surrounded by unnatural things, it does not smell good and oozes „chemistry“
- Its interior climate is bad (like that in a covered bassinet or a badly ventilated bed room).
- It does not warm,
- It wobbles a-rhythmically ( when it is used to help the baby fall asleep it's movement is different from when it is pushed, i.e. rhythmical,
- It only provides non-physiological sounds to the ear,
- The face of the person pushing the pram is too far away ( the small infant can only see up to 40cm distance); if the child is on its stomach it does not see anything,
- Mother or father do not have their hands free,
- It is expensive and after a year it is not used and stands idle,
- The child is laid in it and left „with a carrying device father or mother „has“ to walk around which means daily exercise something that might at the same time be good for possible varicose veins.

In the old days prams did not exist. Infants were carried around even when working (carrying belts in southern Asia, cloths in Africa) or among the nomads (Asia) and indigenous people in America in upright devices (hanging cradles with support for the head also called papooses. Prams were at first the privilege of the rich: the nanny drove the privileged child around in it. Only later did the middle classes copy this „example“.

For over 20 years we have been recommending Frau Hoffmann's DIDYMOS- baby sling . I have been working together with my wife, Dr. med. Magdalene Bonnet in our own practise. She has contributed much to my findings.

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