



Mama's Friend Birth Services

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Wearing Your Baby

History of Babywearing

Babywearing is an ancient tradition in numerous cultures, with each culture's babywearing style adapted to their area's regional characteristics. Cultures in hot climates used thin woven shawls (rebozo wraps in Central America, kanga scarfs in Africa, and slendang slings in Indonesia) to tie babies to the mother. In cold climates, mothers used warm parkas (the Inuit Eskimos' amauti) or blankets (the Korean podaegi) as child carriers. Mountainous regions like Tibet and Nepal historically carried babies high on their backs with wraparound fabrics; this makes sense because if you were climbing a mountain, you would want the weight to be up high instead of down low. Several other cultures had their own baby carriers and traditions.

Babies Are Meant to Be Carried

Many scientists believe we have a lot in common with marsupial animals, whose babies must be carried. Human babies are born before they are able to walk, talk, or meet their own needs. Because of our upright stature, humans have small pelvises in proportion to our bodies; we also have large brains in proportion to the rest of our bodies. In order to get that large brain to pass through a small pelvis, babies must be born before they are ready to survive on their own; therefore, human babies benefit from being in constant contact with the mother.

Researchers have compared the composition of human breastmilk to mammals who cache (or store in safe locations) their offspring and to mammals who are in constant contact with their offspring (by carrying them or being followed by them). Mammals that cache their young produce milk that is high in fat and high in protein. They feed their young at spaced intervals and have infants who suckle at a fast rate. Mammals that carry or are followed by their young produce milk that is low in fat and protein. They feed their young more or less continuously and have infants who suckle slowly. Human breastmilk has paltry amounts of both protein (0.9%) and fat (3.8%). This data leads several researchers to believe we are designed to carry our babies with us and to feed our babies continuously (Lozoff & Brittenham, 1979; McKenna et al., 1993).

Ergonomical Carrying

To be carried ergonomically, babies need to avoid any front-facing carrier. Front-facing carriers encourage hip dysplasia, force a straight posture that is untypical at this age, and puts a baby's weight on the developing pelvic cartilage and on the baby's crotch (or testicles for boys). Three things suggest that infants are meant to be carried with wide-spread and bent legs, a slightly rounded back, and facing the adult. First, the hips are not fully developed at birth, and the thighbone properly fills out the hip socket when the legs are spread and bent. Secondly, infants naturally bend and spread their legs when someone picks them up. And thirdly, babies are born with a c-curved back; the s-shape of the spine does not develop until a baby learns to walk on its own.

For carrying to be ergonomical for the adult as well, the weight of the carrier should not be borne only by the shoulders (like the Baby Bjorn and Infantino front packs), but should also be distributed across the wearer's hips or torso as well as across the shoulders. This means you need a waist belt like the ones in an Ergo, mei tai, or wraparound carrier. The child can be worn for longer periods of time if the weight is distributed evenly between both shoulders, so be sure to trade shoulders frequently if you are using a pouch sling or ring sling.

Babywearing Safety

Always make sure your baby can breathe; baby's head should never be curled against its chest (even in car seats or being held in arms), and baby's face should never be covered with fabric.

Never wear your baby in any dangerous situation—including running or jumping, cooking, boating, or any activity that requires protective gear or poses a safety hazard to small children.

When trying a new carry, practice with or without a doll first. Use a spotter, and make sure baby is well-fed and content. Frequently check your baby's breathing and her security in the carrier.