

Babywearing Safety



When done properly, carrying a baby in a soft baby carrier can be safer than carrying a baby in your arms. Your carrier doesn't have muscles that get tired, and your carrier doesn't have arms that reflexively reach out to balance you or catch you when you fall. But, as with anything concerning babies, good safety practices are of paramount importance. This brochure has many safety tips, but no set of guidelines can anticipate every circumstance. **You are responsible for your child's safety as well as your own.**

Whatever carrier you choose, learn to use it properly, and always keep safety in mind.

A Few ABSOLUTE RULES

- 1. MAKE SURE YOUR BABY CAN BREATHE.** Baby carriers allow parents to be hands-free to do other things ... but you must always remain active in caring for your child. No baby carrier can ensure that your baby always has an open airway; that's your job.
 - a. Never allow a baby to be carried, held, or placed in such a way that his chin is curled against his chest.** This rule applies to babies being held in arms, in baby carriers, in infant car seats, or in any other kind of seat or situation. This position can restrict the baby's ability to breathe. Newborns lack the muscle control to open their airways. They need good back support in carriers so that they don't slump into the chin-to-chest position.
 - b. Never allow a baby's head and face to be covered with fabric.** Covering a baby's head and face can cause her to "re-breathe" the same air, which is a dangerous situation. Also, covering her head and face keeps you from being able to check on her. Always make sure your baby has plenty of airflow. Check on her frequently.
- 2. Never jog, run, jump on a trampoline, or do any other activity that subjects your baby to similar shaking or bouncing motion.** "This motion can do damage to the baby's neck, spine and/or brain," explains the American Chiropractic Association.
- 3. Never use a baby carrier when riding in a car.** Soft baby carriers provide none of the protection that car seats provide.
- 4. Use only carriers that are appropriate for your baby's age and weight.** For example, frame backpacks can be useful for hiking with older babies and toddlers but are not appropriate for babies who can not sit unassisted for extended periods. Front packs usually have a weight range of 8 to 20 pounds; smaller babies may slip out of the carrier, and larger babies will almost certainly cause back discomfort for the person using the carrier.

A Few Guidelines for Everyday Safety

1. Inspect your carrier regularly to ensure it is sound. Check the fabric, seams, and any buckles or other fasteners. Do this every time you use it to avoid complacency. Don't use a carrier unless it is structurally sound.
2. When using carriers out and about, check that your baby is secure by using reflective surfaces as mirrors, such as car or store windows. Double check the baby's position with your hands, or enlist the help of another set of eyes.
3. If you should not do it while pregnant because of an enhanced risk of falls, you should not do it while carrying a baby. For example, your risk of falling increases when you climb a ladder, ride a horse, ride a bicycle, or go skating. Your risk of falling also increases on slippery surfaces like the ones you encounter when you go bowling, sailing, or spelunking. When a baby is in his mother's womb, he has built-in protection, but a baby in arms or in a carrier does not have that protection.
4. If you should wear protective gear while doing an activity, you should not do it while carrying a baby. Baby carriers do not provide hearing protection, eye protection, protection from projectiles such as rocks flung from a lawn mower, protection from fumes or dust such as occur during lawn mowing and some household cleaning tasks, or protection from falls.
5. Protect your baby from the elements. Little limbs and heads may need sun protection. Do not dress your baby too warmly in the summer, and do not use a baby carrier under circumstances that could cause the baby to suffer heat stress.

Do not let your baby get too cold in the winter. (There are some excellent coats and ponchos designed especially for use with baby carriers, and you can also improvise or make your own.)

6. Be aware of what your baby can reach. In particular, be aware that a baby on your back can reach things you can't see.

7. Do not put loose items in the carrier with your baby that can be choking hazards, that can poke your baby, or that can cover your baby's face.

8. Other Things to Consider: Carrying a baby in arms or in a carrier is a task for a responsible adult who can assess risk in a mature way. Here are some things to consider about specific activities.

Cooking. Carrying a baby while cooking subjects the baby to an enhanced risk of burns. A baby in arms or in a carrier is at stovetop height, and burns can occur. Reaching into a hot oven while carrying a baby similarly puts the baby at risk for burns.

Boating. While it might seem more secure to use a baby carrier to board a small boat than to carry a baby in arms, the safer practice is to have the baby wear a personal flotation device. Personal flotation devices are generally not compatible with baby carriers. Moreover, if you fell into the water, having your baby securely held to your body by a baby carrier would be a grave danger.

Safety Guidelines for Learning New Carries

Most people easily learn front or hip carries, but when learning these carries you should still support your baby with your arm until you are confident that your baby is securely held in the carrier. Back carries are more challenging, but the reward is tremendous liberation and, for heavier babies and toddlers, greater comfort for the person carrying the child. These guidelines apply to all carries but are particularly important when learning back carries:

1. **Practice with a doll or teddy first.** Understanding the instructions with your mind is just the first step; your body needs to understand them as well. Doing a few "dry runs" will help you build the muscle memory for doing a particular carry.

2. **It is best to try a new carry with your baby when you are both well rested and generally content.**

3. **Use a spotter ... but only another adult who accepts the responsibility of keeping your baby from falling.** The spotter must be able to catch the baby at any instant if he or she should start to fall.

4. **Use a mirror.**

5. **Start low.** Most carries can be accomplished while sitting on the floor. As you build muscle memory and confidence, you can move up, next lifting your baby onto your body from a bed or chair.



Right

Chin up; Face visible;
Nose and mouth free

Wrong

Baby's face is covered

Wrong

Baby is too low

Wrong

Baby is hunched with
chin touching chest

Wrong

Baby's face is pressed
tight against wearer