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Newsletter

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Baby Wearing

Since the dawning of the “Back to Sleep” program, recommending that babies be placed on their backs in order to reduce the risk of SIDS, babies spend more time on their backs than ever.

When we add in the time spent in baby carriers, it’s no wonder that there is a significant increase in the number of babies with flat spots on the back of their little heads. However, the bigger concern here is not cosmetic but instead, the concern of cranial distortions potentially resulting in compromised neurological function. Now more than ever before it’s important that infants spend less of their awake time on their backs and this is easy enough to accomplish.

Why to Wear Your Baby

The benefits of baby wearing are vast. For instance, research has shown that babies who are carried cry 43% less than those who aren’t and 54% less during the evening hours when colicky babies may be the most fussy.

Babies that are worn while awake also spend much more time in a quiet and alert state which is ideal for learning – since they are feeling safe and secure they are more open to outside stimuli and that is the world from your point of view, not the limited view available from their crib, car seat or stroller. Since they are closer to people and can study facial expressions, carried

infants are more socialized and will typically learn to speak sooner and be more familiar with body language, becoming independent at an earlier age.

Carried or worn infants are also calmer because all of their needs are being met, both their primal and survival needs. They can see, hear, smell, touch and even taste their primary caregiver.

According to Dr. William Sears, the pediatrician that coined the phrase “attachment parenting”, being in this position for most of their waking hours provides a motion that has shown to be beneficial for neural development as well as the baby’s gastrointestinal and respiratory health. The parental rhythms (walking, heartbeat, etc.) have a balancing and soothing effect on the infant.

Due to the decreased amount of time spent on their backs, the risk of plagiocephaly or the above mentioned “flat head syndrome” is greatly reduced.

When to Wear Your Baby

In many cultures, if the baby is awake then it is being worn or carried by mom, dad or another caregiver. Anthropologists and psychologists studying the behavior of mother and child have determined that their interaction actually shapes their behavior. When the baby seems in distress mother offers a soothing touch or word. When the baby seems hungry she offers her breast. When the baby focuses on her, she focuses back while smiling or talking in a loving tone. For each action of the baby, the mother responds. According to an article published by the La Leche League, “These sensitive, personality-shaping interactions happen most readily when babies are in the arms of their parents.”

Baby wearing is an opportunity to provide closeness even when you’re not providing the baby with you’re undivided attention. When cooking, cleaning, running after a toddler, grocery shopping or performing any other typical parental task, wearing your baby allows for the baby’s continued security while making it possible for you to perform other functions.

Baby wearing also has physiological benefits for the mother, including increased oxytocin levels leading to a more intimate maternal bond, easier breastfeeding and improved care potentially lowering the incidence of postpartum depression.

Additionally, since the hormone relaxin may stay in your body up to nine months following delivery, ease in carrying your baby and less lifting of car seats may prevent postural or spinal misalignments that could cause discomfort.

In fact, car seats should only be used while the baby is in a car. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that infants spend the least amount possible in seating that maintains a supine or reclined position including car seats (unless they are actually a passenger in a vehicle). It is best for infants to be upright while being held, carried or worn.

Some parents have expressed concern that a baby who is constantly held or worn will become fussy and demanding of attention, but studies have actually shown that the opposite is true. Apparently, babies that are worn tend to be more satisfied and secure.

How to Wear Your Baby

With the increase in information available, baby wearing has become more popular and so there is a wide variety of slings and carriers available. Slings with rings come in many different fabrics with varying colors and patterns. They can be used for newborns, older babies and toddlers. The sling is typically adjusted by running the tail fabric through the rings and then tightening or loosening it until the wearer feels comfortable. With a sling, the baby can be on the front, side or back. Pouch carriers are similar to slings but offer fewer options for adjustment and generally hold the baby in the front or back only. Long tied wraps are 12 feet long and made of woven or knit fabric. The wearer wraps and ties the fabric around her and the baby to keep the infant secure. More common but not always the best is the backpack or front carrier. Since the design is more

rigid in structure it doesn't always offer options for baby positioning, and are not flexible from one wearer to the next. Should you choose to go this route it would be wise to purchase two so that the straps and clips don't have to be adjusted when being used by more than one wearer.

How to Choose a Carrier

When considering the purchase of a carrier, be sure to think about the following:

Can the carrier be worn on the front, side and back?

Can the baby be positioned forward-facing, chest-facing, upright, supine and with either their legs straight or bent comfortably?

Can the baby be transferred from the carrier to their crib without waking?

Can a sleeping infant be transferred from one wearer to another without disturbing the baby's sleep?

Can the baby breastfeed discreetly and comfortably while in the carrier?

Is the carrier large enough to be used for several months, the first year of life or into the toddler years?

Is it washable and how difficult is it to wash?

Does the carrier evenly distribute the infant's weight for the comfort of the wearer or will it cause stress or postural compensations to the wearer's spine?

Can the infant be shifted or repositioned easily or will the wearer require assistance?

When using the carrier are the wearer's hands free or must they support the baby with one hand?