

Babes in Arms - An Instinctively Natural Way to Carry Your Baby

by Alice Hansen

To hold your new baby close is a mother's natural instinct. The soft newborn scent, wide new eyes and gentle breathing rhythms are pure joy. Surely new mothers and fathers should experience these precious moments for as long as possible.

For most parents, this magical time is unforgettable, yet relatively short-lived. Despite the new family addition, life hurries on and demands the shift of attention back to daily routine. There are places to get to and chores to tackle. However, through the concept of 'babywearing,' a busy parent has the freedom to engage in every-day activities as normal.

Particularly for new parents, the transition of learning to incorporate their new arrival into daily life can be difficult. Not only does a new mother have to learn the motherly ropes very quickly, she must also learn how to introduce her baby into her current lifestyle smoothly.

Imagine being a new mother, your hands filled with a brand new bundle of joy and wondering just how this new arrival is going to change your life. As much as it is an exciting time, it can also be a very overwhelming time where everything is new and unknown.

Are you going to be able to enjoy coffee with friends? Are you going to be able to continue working from home part-time? Are you going to be able to get out and enjoy the outdoors with your partner like you did before?

It is natural to wonder how the baby will impact on the lifestyle you have always known. It is not selfish to consider how you are going to have time for *you* in a way that includes your baby in daily routine.

What if there was a solution? What if there was a way to include your baby in every day life completely trouble-free? By literally 'wearing' the baby in a sling or baby carrier, the parent is offered the versatility to go about daily life while providing the child an intimate, nurturing environment. In doing so, the parent's hands and arms are free to tend to other activities while the baby remains close.

As an ancient tradition, baby wearing has been enjoyed by indigenous cultures across the world but only recently have Western cultures realised its benefits. As a result, a growing number of baby carriers and slings have become available on the world market, catering to specific needs of family's chosen lifestyles.

"For me, embracing an instinctive parenting style and using a baby carrier with my first child, led to my home-based business," explains Anita Lincolne-Lomax, founder of Babes in Arms. Before the birth of her first child, Anita researched extensively the use of baby carriers and ways to incorporate her baby into the lifestyle she desired.

Through her research, Anita soon found there was a great demand for slings and baby carriers within the country and has since become a distributor for Australia and New Zealand for two international brands.

“It’s beautiful having your child so close and having that intimate contact with them,” explains Anita, “you can read their cues more readily and ultimately you become the translator of your environment to your child. Babies love experiencing the world from the safety and warmth of their parent’s arms.”

Finding the correct baby wearing carrier or sling suitable for the parent and child can also aid in health benefits when fitted correctly. Trial and error might be necessary to find the ideal carrier, however, is well worth the research.

“We had been using a variety of slings and baby carriers, trying to find the right one for us,” explains new mother, Nerida May. “However, each sling just seemed to contribute to my chronic neck pain and shoulder injuries that I received in a car accident a few years ago. Eventually it got to the point where I could only wear our little girl for about 10 minutes before terrible pain would set in. The ERGObaby Carrier shifts our baby’s weight to my waist and the relief is amazing.”

Not only mothers, but also fathers can benefit greatly from baby-wearing. Physical closeness between a father and his newborn can sometimes be overlooked. However, a father holding his baby close offers the emotional, psychological and physical connection that is vital for ‘parent-baby bonding.’

“There are countless benefits for a baby, emotionally, psychologically and developmentally,” says Anita, “but as a new mother the baby-wearing benefits stretch far beyond the needs of the baby. Mothers have the freedom and versatility to do so much more by carrying their babies this way.”

Because baby-wearing is an easy way for mothers to move around with their babies, this tends to lead to a more active lifestyle. Mothers are able to go for walks, get outside into the fresh air or even run errands without the need to consider a cumbersome pram or alternate method of bringing along their baby.

In addition, baby wearing allows a mother to take her baby along with her and engage in activities that otherwise would not be possible. A walk on the beach, for instance, is not possible with soft sand and pram wheels. A mother able to wear her baby, however, has the ability to stroll where ever she pleases.

“I can now wear my baby and vacuum, reach high and low, do all the laundry, dance around the lounge with my little ones, go picking blueberries or hunt for insects with my boys, cook dinner and do the dishes,” explains mother, Serene Allison, “my back and shoulders don’t need a rest and I can forget I even have the baby. Attachment style mothering has now become as easy as toting around a feather.”

In a culture where many mothers move from a career to becoming a full-time mother, there can be difficulty in losing a former career identity and moving into a more anonymous role. In some cases, this can lead to post natal depression.

New mothers can feel isolated at home with their babies, and may sense loss in their own personal freedom. If it is easy for a mother to get out and engaged socially with other people, she is more likely to do so.

Through baby-wearing, a baby then can become part of the mother's activities, without constantly being the focal point of daily choices. The child can literally 'come along for the ride' without limiting the mother's ability to engage and perform tasks that she was accustomed to before the baby's birth.

In addition, often a baby carrier is less bulky and as a result means often the parent can do things that are typically more difficult with one hand on a pram and the other holding a dog leash.

Baby carriers offer hands-free freedom and such activities as bushwalking are not possible with the aid of a pram. At any young age, baby carriers lend themselves perfectly to outdoor pursuits.

Other benefits for parents include greater bonding with the infant. Through this heightened sensitivity, a parent is better equipped to attend to cues and needs of the child instinctively. Holding the baby close, even the slightest movement or noise can be felt and noticed immediately. This is not only beneficial to the parent, but also allows the baby to read cues and become more sensitive to his or her carrier.

As the baby grows, the benefit of baby carrying also offers muscle strength for the parent relative to the weight of the growing child. The parent will find themselves becoming naturally stronger and better able to carry their infant as the weight gently increases. This physical aspect for the parent encourages heightened blood circulation, muscle strength and general fitness.

The benefits of baby wearing are extensive on an emotional level. Research indicates that babies held in a sling cry 43% less during the day and 51% at night. Through the presence of their mother's rhythms, babies feel safe and secure.

During the early stages of life, the familiarity of a mother's breathing, warmth and heartbeat is comforting and calming for the newborn. Through holding a baby close by way of a sling or baby carrier, the transition from womb to outside world is far more gentle.

From a cognitive perspective, babies are in a position to learn more readily from the position of a sling. They can interact with their environment and people around them from their parent's arms.

In a position which is level with the parent or caregiver, the baby can experience his or her new world from an equal perspective. In contrast, a baby lying or seated in a pram does not have the same perception or view and is often able to only look up toward activity or stimuli.

Babies also benefit from this mode of transport physiologically through being close to the parent and regularly touched which stimulates growth hormones. In addition, baby wearing assists a baby's sense of balance and regulates cardiac output, respiration and circulation.

Improvements in physical and nerve strength have been discovered by developmental neurologists in mothers who are active and move constantly during pregnancy. Likewise, the same has been noted for children who are carried after birth.

Carrying a baby in a sling throughout the day also assists in the development of a baby's circadian rhythms, allowing for longer, deeper sleep cycles which assist in brain maturation. Digestion is promoted through the upright position of baby-wearing, while infants who are breast-feeding have easy access to their source of nourishment.

While parents may choose a combination of methods to carry their baby, dependant on their needs and lifestyle, baby-wearing offers unique benefits. Parents may choose to carry their baby on the front during early days to keep a close eye on their new born. As the child grows in size and weight, parents might feel more comfortable with a back position. Certain baby carriers can convert from the front to the back, while others may choose to move from a sling to a more rigid style carrier.

Where a pram or stroller creates distance between a parent and child, baby-wearing offers the innate intimacy necessary for early development. The baby remains close at all times, and never needs to sense that their care-giver is out of sight or not nearby.

"A pram is an inanimate plastic object. It does not smell familiar, it has no breath to it or heartbeat," says Anita, "there is nothing communicated through that pram to the child."

A variety of carriers is available online through Babes in Arms, have all been personally tried and tested and the website offers extensive information on how to select a carrier best suited to a family's needs and way of life.

In addition, Babes in Arms are committed to making poverty history through donating 10% of all profits to TEAR Australia which works to support child-headed households in Uganda.

For more information Contact:
Anita Lincolne-Lomax
Babes in Arms
Toll-free: 1300 725 276
info@babesinarms.com.au
www.babesinarms.com.au