

This information sheet summarises research-based evidence about the risks and benefits of allowing babies to sleep in a sling or baby carrier during their daytime sleep.

For more information on this and many other topics, please visit [www.basionline.org.uk](http://www.basionline.org.uk)

Around the world, babies are carried by their parents and community members throughout the day. These babies spend their days in a sling, which is usually made from a simple piece of cloth, alternating between periods of sleep and alertness. In the UK and US, the practice of carrying a baby in a sling or baby carrier is known as 'babywearing'. It's less common for parents in the UK to use a sling for their babies' daytime sleep but there are many reasons why this may be helpful.

### What are the benefits?



**Carrying your baby in a sling while they sleep may benefit them, while also allowing you to have your hands free.**

Little research has looked specifically at the benefits of carrying babies in a sling while they sleep. However research in related areas suggests that keeping close contact may have benefits for both mother and baby.

The advice for new parents is that your baby should sleep in a cot in the same room as you, day and night, until they are at least 6 months old. Studies have shown this to reduce the risk of SIDS. An English study, comparing 325 SIDS babies with 1300 control babies, found that 75% of the day-time SIDS deaths occurred while babies were alone in a room. Using a sling or baby carrier may make it easier for you to keep your baby close during the day.

Research looking at new-born babies has shown that close contact and carrying helps to calm them, and helps them to sleep. They can hear your heartbeat, feel your movements, and be reassured that you are close, and will not feel the stress of being separated from you. When your baby starts to stir, you will be immediately aware of it if you are wearing them. You can pick up on their feeding cues more easily and breast milk production is improved when you keep your baby close to you. Some research shows that mothers who hold their babies feel calmer, less anxious, and show less cortisol reaction to stress. Another study has shown that being held while a parent is moving reduces crying and decreases rapid heart rate in babies.

Parents who formula feed may find that wearing their baby also helps them to bond and, for Dads and partners, babywearing may allow you to take your baby for a walk, giving your partner some time to themselves. Using a sling helps you to keep your hands free for other tasks.

## Are there any disadvantages?

Sometimes parents are worried that babies who settle to sleep in a sling or baby carrier may be less likely to settle on their own.

Parental experience highlights that there is huge variation in babies' sleep preferences. Some babies settle better when they sleep in a cot alone, whilst others find it difficult to settle if put down alone for sleep. Studies show that babies need to have positive sleep associations and that babies whose sleep environment is calm, and for whom going to sleep is pleasant, develop better long-term sleeping habits. For some babies, a calm and pleasant sleep environment involves being in contact with their caregiver – a typical practice in many countries. Some babies therefore prefer to settle by being soothed by their parents, and not by being left alone, so these babies fall asleep happily in a sling. Some parents choose to wear their babies until they fall asleep and then lie them down, and some slings are easy to take off if your baby falls asleep at nighttime and you want to remove the sling without disturbing them.

## Is babywearing safe?

Babies born prematurely who are carried (in skin-to-skin contact) by their parents have improved temperature regulation, increased oxygen saturation and, over time, better growth. The World Health Organisation supports 24 hour-a-day babywearing for premature babies, until they reach their full gestational age, especially where modern medical care is unavailable to parents. While most parents won't need to consider wearing their babies in direct skin contact, or 24/7, this should offer some reassurance that baby wearing can be safe and beneficial, even during a long daytime nap. Skin-to-skin contact with a newborn baby is recommended for all babies shortly after birth as it helps calm mother and baby, ensures baby is colonised with the mother's bacteria, and helps with hormones that aid milk production.

Placing a baby incorrectly in a sling or soft carrier can be dangerous, and lead to risk of falls, entrapment, or suffocation.

Always make sure babies' airways are clear and they don't slump down into a hazardous position when asleep or whilst feeding.



- ✓ **TIGHT**
- ✓ **IN VIEW AT ALL TIMES**
- ✓ **CLOSE ENOUGH TO KISS**
- ✓ **KEEP CHIN OFF THE CHEST**
- ✓ **SUPPORTED BACK**

As with any item of baby equipment, you may want to take some time to practise using a sling or baby carrier, perhaps with another adult watching you. Be sure to follow the manufacturers' instructions for safe use of any sling, carrier or other equipment. Carefully check any sling or baby carrier that you own, buy or borrow for wear and tear. Only undertake safe activities while your child is in the sling or baby carrier – no jogging, cycling or extreme sports!

Be careful when selecting your sling, carrier, or other equipment. Some 'bag style' slings are shaped in a way that leads to the baby curling up in the sling, pressing their chin towards the chest. TICKS was developed by the UK Sling Consortium ([www.babyslingsafety.co.uk](http://www.babyslingsafety.co.uk)) and you can find further information on sling safety and the types of slings available at [www.carryingmatters.co.uk](http://www.carryingmatters.co.uk) and [www.babywearing.co.uk](http://www.babywearing.co.uk). Or find a sling meet, group or library or a Baby-wearing Consultant near you on their information pages.

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