

## Feeding in a sling / baby carrier by [Southsea Slings](#)

Using a sling/baby carrier is a skill, and so too is feeding your baby, whatever methods you are using. Generally, once you have got to grips with each skill separately, combining the two is easier. Essential considerations when feeding your baby in a sling/baby carrier include:

- Supported head
- Keeping chin off chest
- No fabric over the back of head or face
- Once not actively feeding reposition baby to a kissable upright carry
- Parents/carers actively attentive to their baby



*Southsea Slings Drop In session breastfeeding in the Integra Baby carrier*

A sling/carrier is simply a replacement for holding and carrying your baby in your arms, allowing you to have frequent skin to skin contact and closeness, whilst going about some of your regular tasks and activities, including self-care and the needs of other children.

Carrying your baby is a great way to assist with successful breastfeeding, here's why;

- it helps to trigger the **release of oxytocin**. Oxytocin stimulates the 'let-down', the reflex to allow the flow of milk. The release of oxytocin is determined by all the senses and experiences' of the mother; contact with her baby, touch, smell, sound, sight and even thoughts of her baby and her baby's hunger. Using a sling allows all the senses to be experienced with ease.
- **Less stress**. If a mother is unwell, unhappy or perhaps experiencing postnatal depression or anxiety or distress their release of oxytocin may be inhibited. A carrier is a brilliant way to facilitate the necessary close physical contact whilst still being able to get on with even the most basic tasks; e.g. being able to grab some food for yourself or go to the loo! Those tasks can also include the needs that many mothers have to care for other children or family members. Together with the right practical and emotional support, it is a great aid to recovering and establishing or re-establishing breastfeeding and a positive loving relationship.
- **Responsive feeding**. Baby's cues showing hunger or their state of sleep are easily read by the mother because they are in such close contact. Often this means baby can be offered a feed **before** they reach a very hungry and distressed state, meaning latching baby on can be easier because they are more relaxed.
- **Your comfort can be aided**. Sometimes using a sling to breastfeed in helps mothers hold their babies in a more comfortable position – even when seated for some mothers a sling can aid establishing a deeper latch or holding baby's weight more comfortably.
- **Transport and socialising**. Humans are social and mobile creatures and though it is important not to put pressure on yourself to get out and about and 'back to normal', especially in the early days, it is great to be confident that you can when you are ready. Having the skill to be able to feed your baby in a carrier/sling means you are able to get out and about with that valuable added skill. It can promote longer term breastfeeding because you are not restricted to having to find a particular spot to nurse in; e.g. you can keep your

place in a queue and not have a crying baby, or you can keep walking home and not have to turn back to sit in a cafe...

- **Longer lasting breastfeeding** sometimes an older baby may be hungry but easily distracted from feeding – the use of a sling/carrier can be great for allowing some down time for concentrating on a necessary feed.

## Safety whilst feeding your baby in a sling/carrier.

The essential safety guidance for using a sling/carrier will apply whenever you carry your baby. If you are in any doubt about these, then please pop along to a Southsea Slings drop-in session, book a consultation with us or get along to see your local babywearing consultants. The **ABC** and **TICKS** guidelines are here, they are putting words to your instincts as parents and they provide a great check list for you to go through. Please ensure you are familiar with these basic safety requirements and

understand them.

### The **T.I.C.K.S.** Rule for Safe Babywearing

Keep your baby close and keep your baby safe.

When you're wearing a sling or carrier, don't forget the **T.I.C.K.S.**



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



**TIGHT** – slings and carriers should be tight enough to hug your baby close to you as this will be most comfortable for you both. Any stock/loose fabric will allow your baby to slump down in the carrier which can hinder their breathing and pull on your back.



**IN VIEW AT ALL TIMES** – you should always be able to see your baby's face by simply glancing down. The fabric of a sling or carrier should not close around them so you have to open it to check on them. In a cradle position your baby should face upwards not be turned in towards your body.



**CLOSE ENOUGH TO KISS** – your baby's head should be as close to your chin as is comfortable. By tipping your head forward you should be able to kiss your baby on the head or forehead.



**KEEP CHIN OFF THE CHEST** – a baby should never be curled so their chin is forced onto their chest as this can restrict their breathing. Ensure there is always a space of at least a finger width under your baby's chin.



**SUPPORTED BACK** – in an upright carry a baby should be held comfortably close to the wearer so their back is supported in its natural position and their tummy and chest are against you. If a sling is too loose they can slump which can partially close their airway. (This can be tested by placing a hand on your baby's back and pressing gently – they should not uncurl or move closer to you.) A baby in a cradle carry in a pouch or ring sling should be positioned carefully with their bottom in the deepest part so the sling does not fold them in half pressing their chin to their chest.

Now I know my ABCs!

# QUICK BABY WEARING REMINDERS

Sometimes, using a carrier comes naturally. Sometimes, it takes practice. Remembering these ABCs can help you achieve a safe and satisfying fit for you and your child.

- A** AIRWAY: Ensure baby's airway stays open by keeping chin off of chest, and allow fresh air to circulate around baby's face. Keep child close enough to kiss and in view at all times.
- B** BODY POSITIONING: Be sure the carrier supports baby in a way that is appropriate to his/her level of neck and trunk control and prevents slumping, ideally with baby's knees higher than bum and weight borne by thighs and bottom.
- C** COMFORT: The carrier should be comfortable for you and baby. If you do not feel comfortable and confident with the carry you are doing, have a spotter nearby to help you. If you need help using your carrier, contact your local BWI chapter.

[www.babywearinginternational.org](http://www.babywearinginternational.org)

TICKS used with permission of the UK Sling Consortium

<http://babyslingsafety.co.uk/>

When feeding your baby in a sling/carrier there are some different factors to consider. Most of the safety rules will remain the same, but for instance your baby will generally not be at the safe kissable height whilst feeding. **The most essential point is to ensure you protect your baby's airways and breathing.**

Babies find it easier to breathe through their noses than their mouths, especially in the early months. So it is crucial that nothing blocks the flow of air to their nose, as whilst they are feeding this is their only airway. Anyone using the sling or carrier needs to be aware of making the flow of air unrestricted; clear from sling/carrier fabric, clothing, breast tissue etc. and also baby's neck should not be too far bent over, either front or back (i.e. no chin to chest or fully flexed backwards).

## **Positions and safety**

The positioning and styles of sling/carrier that work best is a personal matter to each individual and varies, based on lots of factors. If in any doubt about what could work best for you and your baby please come and see us or seek the advice of a babywearing consultant. Southsea Slings would strongly advise that you never pull any fabric over the back of your baby's head or ever restrict your baby's ability to pull their head away from you whilst feeding. Your baby's head should be supported by your arm, hand and perhaps part of the sling at the crook of their neck and lower part of their head (occiput) only. The weight of your baby's head (the lower part) will be resting up your arm or hand. Your baby will then always have the ability to safely take in a little extra air, or have a cough to clear their throat.

**What's the safest positioning for feeding your baby in a sling/carrier? It could be upright or reclined hold, either way you need to be able to;**

- easily and frequently check on your baby's state, their positioning and spot any changes;
- maintain a good air flow to your baby at all times, keeping their chin off their chest. If in doubt, you should be able to place two fingers between the bone of baby's chin and their chest. Do not pull sling/carrier fabric up the back of their head;
- confidently adjust baby's positioning rapidly;
- ensure that aside from the kissable height point, and perhaps a degree of tightness lacking, all the other points of TICKS safety are being met;
- **re-position baby back to the kissable height after they stopped actively feeding** and be able to establish the optimal positioning where baby's knees are higher than their bottom, in a deep seated squatting position;
- be sure that when not feeding all the safety guidance of TICKS and ABC are being met.

**Many parents and babies need to practice together before feeling confident to rely on this new skill. Give yourself time and seek out help if you need to.** We find many people come to feeding babies in their slings and carriers when they are past the earliest months. However, we also assist many parents, especially those with a second child who wish to feed their new born in a sling from day one. Empowered with good, detailed information allows parents to make the choices that work best for them and their family to be able to feed in a sling/carrier. If you feel uncertain as to what your options are or whether a certain solution is safe or not, make contact with us at Southsea Slings or your local professionals for some face to face advice.

## FAQ

### Where should my baby's arms and hands be?

- Wherever feels best for you both. As a general rule allowing baby to have their hands accessible to their own head is great, when feeding near or around the breast or bottle you are feeding from often works well. With a new born that you are struggling to latch on because their hands are getting to their mouth before your breast, it may be that you can use the sling to help you keep their hands out of their mouth (if needed pop along to a lactation and breastfeeding group such as Breastfeeding Matters in Portsmouth – once a month you can have access to both sling and lactation consultant advice at the same time or book a private consultation). Your baby's head should be in a comfortable neutral position and not appear at any uncomfortable angle.



Picture credit Ergo baby

### What about my baby's feet?

- Allow your baby's feet to be free of any of the fabric so that they are not restricted at all. This will assist in allowing your baby to be comfortable and able to reach the height they need to latch on.

### Is it dangerous to feed your baby in a sling if they have a cold?

- A baby with a blocked nose has restricted airways and will have to latch and come off (de-latch) more often to be able to do some breathing through their mouth. You need to be aware that it is essential that the baby is free to pull away from you to be able to mouth breath.

### Tell me the best sling/carrier to breastfeed in, I just want be able to feed hands free!

- So there isn't really such a thing as a totally hands-free breastfeeding sling because your baby will need one of your arms or hands for head support. However generally you'll get one hand freed up. The best sling to breastfeed in will vary from person to person. It is possible to feed in most carriers and slings, with varying degrees of comfort and ease dependent on the individual and their baby. The best way to assess what will work best for you and your baby is to try a variety of slings and carriers, learn how to use them for feeding and in general and get answers to any questions you may have.

## What can I do to make breastfeeding in a sling as faff free as possible?

- Aside from using a sling you are comfortable and confident with, there are a few things you can consider to make things as easy as possible. Think easy access to the breast for your baby. Clothing choices can make a big difference. Quick opening tops at the front, pulling up or pulling down, poppers or clips, flaps rather than tough buttons. The least layers between you and your baby the better; with layers over the top of the two of you, in order to be able to remove a layer without having to disturb baby in the carrier – though this does depend on the type of sling and age/the stage of development of your baby somewhat. Many breastfeeding mothers recommend one layer of clothing that you pull up and another down to allow access to the breast without any other area of your body needing to be uncovered. Nursing tops and bras that can be unclipped one handed are very useful. Using gravity to help you latch baby on easily can help. Leaning forward can allow you to manipulate your breast upwards to help latch baby on. Some mothers find they will need to hold their breast for baby during the whole feed. The hoods of some carriers can provide a little shade or cover, but remember not to tighten these or you baby will not be able to latch or de-latch which would not be safe. The use of hoods can also raise the temperature and carbon dioxide levels of air not circulating, another point to be aware of.

## Stretchy wraps and feeding

The stretchy wraps are super popular and affordable. There are hundreds on the market. There are also many ways out there suggested to feed your baby in a stretchy wrap. Some of the suggestions are safer than others. The stretchy wrap as a general sling, used correctly, is an excellent popular sling for small babies from birth up to around 4 months – however this is also the most vulnerable age group in terms of airway protection. It is paramount that a baby's back and head are well supported and meeting the TICKS safety guidance (see above) – at the same time it is essential that your baby can de-latch; pull away from you easily. You must be able to see your baby's face, and your baby's nose must be clear. The most common hold used is the "pocket wrap cross carry" aka "hug hold". User error is quite common with the stretchy wraps so it is well worth getting checked out if in doubt. As an aid to breastfeeding, rather than a breastfeeding on the go carry, it is possible to feed in the stretchy with your baby in a slightly reclined position too. As with any of the slings, be sure to reposition baby to the kissable height and retighten your sling till safe (if you hold your baby's head against your chest and lean forward, bending your knees slightly, your baby should not travel/hang away from you. They should be comfortably snuggled against your body).



*Boba stretchy wrap - photo credit Boba*

## Ring Slings

This sling takes some practice, it is not for everyone, but once mastered it is a truly amazing quick tool for breastfeeding in. Great from birth and beyond. It can be very good for mothers with larger breasts and those who prefer the cradle hold for nursing their babies without a carrier. The sling can be used for upright feeding and reclined. Adjustment is made by using the two metal rings with the fabric of the sling itself passed through them. Understanding that you must reduce the friction between your baby and sling before tightening is essential for making it an easy sling to use. Ring slings look very easy when you watch someone who has used one for a while, however this can be deceptive. If you are struggling, come and see a babywearing consultant for some good face to face assistance.

### **Soft Structured Carriers, tied carriers such as wrap tais & variations**

These carriers provide only the upright feeding position. They tend to work best for babies that have some good head control. If you find the right carrier for you then adjustment to and from the feeding position and back again can be super quick and very secure. There's massive variation between one carrier and the next. However, adjustment for feeding positions is going to be based on loosening the shoulder straps and sometimes the waistband, in order to lower your baby to a height on your body where they are able to latch on to feed. If you are breastfeeding you may need to lift your breast up for your baby to latch on – it may sometimes be a case of holding your breast for your baby whilst they are feeding.

### **Woven Wraps**

Woven wraps are a long length of non-elasticated fabric. There are 1000's on variations from fabric content to length. Frequently, people will start off with a longer length woven wrap, rather than the shorter ones. All can be used to feed in. You can carry your baby and breastfeed in an upright or reclined position with woven wraps. There are lots of options with different carries to suit the personal needs of each carer and baby. As long as you enjoy using woven wraps, finding a position to feed in should not be a problem. The most common first front carry for those new to wraps is called the Front Wrap Cross Carry. This and its variations can easily be adjusted to accommodate a comfortable, upright feeding position. Adjustment is achieved by loosening the fabric, either by untying a knot or moving a knot that is within the sling fabric itself. Hip carries can prove very easy to feed with, especially using a shorter wrap.