

Wearing Your Ring Sling by Jan Heitzler, Sleeping Baby Productions

SAVE THESE INSTRUCTIONS for future reference, and please pass them along if you sell or give away the sling.
Safe use of any baby carrier depends on the user. Always put your baby's safety first.

General Precautions:

- **The sling is made for carrying children from their full-term birth until 35 pounds.** However, your body may have different limitations. Do not use a sling to carry a child you wouldn't ordinarily carry in your arms.
- **Any carrier should hold your baby the way you would hold him in your arms.** Do not use the ring sling to put your baby in a position in which you wouldn't hold him in your arms.
- Never place more than one child in this sling, or wear more than one sling at the same time.
- The fabric should always be snug against your child's body.
- Examine your sling before each use for wear and tear; do not use if excessively worn or torn.
- **Do not use the sling near open flames or high heat,** as the fabric is not fire-retardant or -resistant; nor is your baby!
- **A baby carrier should NEVER be used as a child safety seat.** This sling may not be used as a carseat in any moving vehicle or equipment.

Breathing precautions:

- **NEVER cover your child's face with the sling fabric.**
- **Newborns and small infants are at risk for positional asphyxia.** The weight of your child's head should be supported, but his neck should be mostly straight at all times. If your child is grunting or seems distressed, reposition him. There is an excellent article about positioning for newborns at <http://thebabywearer.com/articles/HowTo/Positioning.pdf>
- **Infants with respiratory conditions, either chronic or acute, can face additional risks in a sling.** Follow all instructions and consult your doctor before using a sling with a baby with health conditions. Be extra vigilant if using a sling with a sick baby.
- Except when the baby is breastfeeding, you should be able to kiss the top of his head.
- Do not leave the baby in the sling when it is not being worn.

Fall hazards:

- **Be aware of the sling tail position:** with a long sling, tuck the tail into the body of the sling, or wrap it around the rings so you do not trip over or otherwise become entangled in it.
- **Do not use your sling during any activities that may injure your child,** such as while exercising, bicycling, running, jumping, etc.
- **Do not use** when drowsy, sleeping, suffering from an illness or condition that impairs balance, taking medication that causes dizziness, or using crutches.
- **Carrying a baby in this sling requires diligence on the part of the caregiver.** Failure to pay attention can lead to falls or failure to notice distress. Be aware that your center of balance is affected when wearing your sling, and be aware of objects and/or people around you that can cause harm.

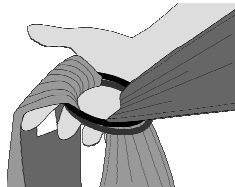
With all those precautions in mind, don't forget that a baby sling is a terrific tool that can help you greatly in daily life. Just like riding a bicycle, you need take safety precautions, but don't let them keep you from enjoying the ride!

Threading the sling:

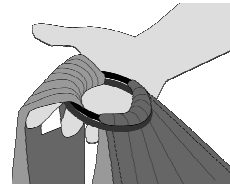
Make sure the fabric is not twisted before threading.



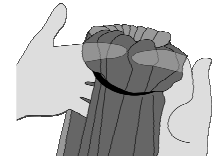
Keep the fabric neatly spread, and make sure the fabric does not twist, as you pull the fabric through both rings from the underside of the sling. The edges of the sling should remain on the outside. Pull it through until about 1/3 of the length of the fabric is through the rings.



Pull the fabric through the bottom ring. This is often easier if you hold the rings apart slightly, especially if the fabric is particularly thick. You may need to pull the edges outwards a couple of times while threading.



Take a moment to spread the fabric out in the rings, making sure the fabric isn't overlapping in the rings. Pull the fabric out about 2" from the rings, and fan it out using your fingers and thumbs. Then pull it back through the rings until it's snug.



Putting on the Sling:

Decide which side you want to wear the sling on. Most use the shoulder of their dominant hand. Remember to switch sides on a regular basis to minimize fatigue. You will need to readjust the upper and lower rails when you switch for a safe, comfortable carry.

To wear on your right shoulder: Hold the rings in your *right* hand with the shoulder seam at the top, tail at the bottom of the rings. Put your *left* arm through the loop of the sling. **To wear on your left shoulder:** Hold the rings in your *left* hand with the shoulder seam at the top, tail at the bottom of the rings. Put your *right* arm through the loop of the sling.



The tail (the material that comes out past the rings) should hang down in front of you, not back over your shoulder, and it should hang from beneath the rings, **not** hang over them and cover them up.

Bring the sling over your head, keeping the rings close to your shoulder, guiding your other arm through the sling like a sash.



NB: Positioning the rings is critical to comfortable wearing: if they are too high on your shoulder, the rings will dig into your skin. If they're too low, there's not enough room for the baby in the sling. The rings should rest at the hollow between your shoulder and breast, with the tops a bit lower than your collarbone.



The sling should not slide off your shoulder toward your neck, as this may lead to back and neck injury. The pleats will keep it from spreading out too much, but be sure it spreads out enough – it should not ride up towards your neck.

Use a mirror to ensure the fabric is also **spread out evenly over your back** by reaching behind you to pull the lower rail down as far as it will go.



Before you put the baby in, **pre-adjust your sling.** There should be just enough room to allow you to put the baby in, with a pouch in the middle of the sling fabric. The closer you have the sling to the final adjustment, the easier it is to wear. This keeps the rings from moving down your chest as well.

With your non-dominant arm in the sling, tighten the pouch around your arm, using your arm as a baby substitute.

Above right: preadjusting for a newborn

Below right: for a larger baby (upper arm is parallel to grown; hand/wrist/arm make a J shape to approximate toddler bum)



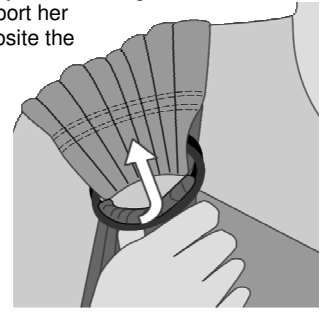
Threading/adjusting issues:

Remember: ALWAYS KEEP ONE HAND ON YOUR CHILD WHILE ADJUSTING THE SLING.

- If you have problems **adjusting the sling**, it's usually because the fabric isn't threaded neatly through the rings. The act of adjusting them can make the fabric scrunch up in the rings, which makes them more difficult to adjust. Whenever you make a major adjustment, take a moment to spread the fabric out in the rings again..
- **Some fabrics are more difficult to adjust than others** even when the fabric is spread out well in the rings. Use and frequent washing will soften the fabric, but patience is key. Adjust a small section of the sling at a time rather than pulling on the whole tail at once.
- **Take a few minutes to practice** before putting the baby in the sling. Adjust the sling around your arm (as above) before putting your baby in. You'll find it much easier to adjust without the baby in the sling. I like to get my slings as tight as I can (and still fit the baby in) before I pick her up.

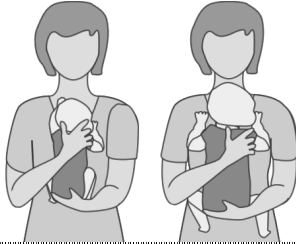
The less adjusting you have to do once your baby is in the sling, the better. If you find you need to adjust it once she's in, support her weight with your hand/arm (usually the one opposite the side the rings are on). The fabric will move a lot easier if her weight isn't also on it.

- To **loosen a sling quickly**, pull up and out on the exposed ring. That takes a lot of the tension off the sling, and will allow the fabric to flow more easily. **Be sure that you are holding your child with your other hand, since once the tension is off, her weight may allow it to flow *too* easily!**

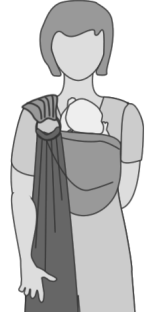


Upright carry:

This is the best carry for newborns, and is great for babies of any age. The chest-to-chest contact is soothing, and most babies prefer being upright to reclining in a cradle hold. You can also nurse in this position once the baby has good head control by loosening the sling to bring the baby's mouth down to the level of your breast.



Tip: To check positioning with any new carry, **consider how you would hold the baby in your arms.** Then adjust the sling around your baby so that she is in that same position. Newborns will naturally curl their legs into a "froggie" position (far left). Until they start to uncurl, you may leave her legs inside the sling in this position, paying attention to her cues to prevent discomfort. For bigger babies (near left), legs should straddle you as much as possible, as though they're riding a horse, and her knees should be higher than her bum. That's best for hip development, and keeps the baby from slipping down in the sling, since she is fully seated in the sling rather than just being held by a small ledge of fabric.



Preparation:

Start with the bottom edge of the sling snug against your body, with almost no slack; for a newborn, make a pouch with the sling).



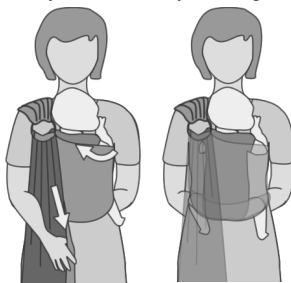
Hold the baby on your shoulder, opposite the rings as though you are going to burp her. With your "ring side" hand on her bum inside the sling to guide her, slide her into the body of the sling, supporting her head with your other hand.



Tighten the sling by pulling fabric from your back towards your front, then pull the tail fabric towards your center. This keeps the outer edges in place, and prevents the rings from sliding down from their ideal spot in the hollow between your shoulder and breast.



If your baby is big enough to have her knees out, they should always be higher than her bottom. In addition to being safer, this also keeps the sling from cutting into the backs of her legs. If you feel you have to hold onto the baby after she is in the sling, there probably isn't enough of a hammock shape to the sling, or she may not be big enough to have her legs out. The body of the sling should be quite snug, to keep her from arching back, and her head should always be close enough for you to kiss in this position.



Nursing in the upright hold:

You can nurse a baby with head control in the cuddle hold; just loosen the sling enough to lower the baby's head so it is close to your breast. You will probably need to loosen the bottom more than the top, which should be fairly snug to keep his upper body secure. When you are finished nursing, bring his head back up to kissing range by tightening the sling. **NEVER leave your baby's face pressed against your breast after she has finished nursing**, as that is a major suffocation risk even when your baby is not in the sling.

Hip carry:

This is terrific for older babies (with head control) all the way up through toddlerhood. Depending on the size of your baby, you will probably be able to start hip carrying her between 4 and 9 months.

Tighten up the bottom of the sling to make a pouch for her to sit in. (In this illustration, the upper arm is parallel to the ground and the lower arm makes a J shape at the wrist.)



Hold the child on your shoulder opposite the rings, as though you were going to burp her.

Keeping one hand on her bottom at all times, slide her legs into the sling. This is a little trickier with toddlers; you'll need to bend their legs and tuck them in to the top of the sling.


Straddle her legs around your waist, as though you were carrying her without a sling. **Her bottom should be a little lower than her knees**, and the sling fabric should be snug behind her knees, like she's sitting in a hammock. This way, her weight is held by her bottom, not her legs.

Spread the fabric out over your child's back. If you are slinging an older baby or need to keep your toddler's hands contained, it should go over her shoulders. You can lower her slightly for easy nursing; just bring her back up to head-kissing level when she's done.




"Kangaroo" or front-facing carry:

Many babies like to see the world when they're out and about. This hold is particularly good those who have good head control and are learning to sit supported, but who are not yet ready for the hip carry. Do not use with newborns under 3 months.



Start with the bottom edge of the sling brought up slightly to make a pouch on the inside, as shown in the "upright carry" preparation step, and hold your baby on your chest, facing outwards, with his legs crossed..

With one hand, reach through the bottom of the sling and lift the baby with his back against your chest, so he doesn't fall forward. Cross his legs with one hand and pull his feet upwards, and with your other hand, open the sling to make a pouch. Lower him into the sling, making sure that his legs are inside the pouch you made, and not going through the bottom.



Pull the top edge upwards to his chest. Adjust and tighten the sling as needed when the baby is in the desired position. The top edge should be particularly snug.

Be aware of your baby's position at all times! Be sure to hold onto your baby with your hands if you are bending over, or squat instead of bending.

Be aware that this is a physiologically demanding position -- it moves your center of gravity far forward, which will tend to tire your lower back muscles quickly. Therefore, use the position for limited periods of time only.

A nice variation on this is a side-sitting carry -- a cross between the kangaroo carry and the cradle hold. The baby goes in the sling with her head towards the rings, but sitting up. Her feet are inside the sling, as with the cradle hold, but she's upright and able to look around with her head free of the sling. This is appropriate only for babies with head control, but it's a great transition between cradle and hip carry.

Partial recline/cradle hold:

Particular caution needs to be taken with this position. **Your baby should never be horizontal in the sling or hidden deep in the fabric.** The ideal position in a cradle hold is actually a partial recline, the way you'd cradle him in your arms. The baby's body should be diagonally inclined in the sling, with his head clear of the fabric so that his chin isn't forced onto his chest, and you should always be able to clearly see his mouth and nose for safety. Grunting and snoring noises that occur only in this position are a sign that he is having trouble breathing and should be repositioned at once. **Always remember that your baby's airway needs to be straight: her chin should never rest on her chest.**

Decide on which side you want his head to rest. If you are petite, you will have an easier time with his head on the side opposite the rings. You may have his head on the same side as the rings if your torso is wide enough; however, a ring-side cradle hold is not as safe as the opposite, since the fabric, drawn up to the rings, may force your baby's head forward onto her chest.



Make a pouch with the body of the sling. Put the sling on as you normally would, and then pull the lower edge upwards on your chest so that you've formed a pouch with the sling. You'll want the lower edge (now the inner edge) to be nice and tight, so pull on the "outside" edge of the tail.



Cradle him with the arm opposite the rings, just as you would if you weren't wearing the sling. Open the sling with your "ring" hand, and slip the baby into the pouch with your arm still around him. Support his head if he is a newborn.



Continue to support his head, and slowly slip your arm out from underneath him. Now you can tighten the sling fully.



You will need to tighten the upper and lower edges -- and even the body of the sling -- independently, by pulling on each in turn. If the sling is difficult to adjust, you can hold the rings apart slightly with one hand, while pulling with the other.



Alternatively, put the baby in an upright carry, then let her tilt over until she's at an angle similar to the last frame.

The technique is similar for the cradle hold with the baby's head on the same side as the rings, but you will want to start with his head at least 4" from the rings, to avoid having them touch his head when the sling is fully adjusted. It's also a little easier to do a semi-sitting position with his head on the ring side.

Nursing in the cradle hold:

You can nurse with the baby on either side relative to the rings; smaller-breasted women may prefer to nurse on the ring side, while larger-breasted women may prefer the opposite. When you're first learning how to breastfeed in a sling, you probably won't do it hands-free right from the start. Experts agree that it's easiest to learn to breastfeed, then learn to breastfeed in a sling.

Pull the sling around her, so that her feet stick out the end. Tiny infants may keep their feet in the sling, but will quickly outgrow that. Adjust the fabric around her bottom and sides so that she is secure.

You may want the sling beneath baby's head with in order to keep her secure, but if you will be holding her with your non-dominant arm, that's not strictly necessary. Tighten the sling until you are both comfortable. You may need to loosen the lower edge while tightening the upper edge. Practice this while sitting down, for safety's sake. **Be sure you can see your baby's face at all times while she is nursing, and check her often; there is a suffocation risk if her nose is blocked.**



You can use the sling tail to cover your breast, if you desire. This is most helpful when you are learning to breastfeed in the sling, or when you are getting things set up. However, you *must* be sure that you can still see her mouth and nose while she is nursing! When I nurse in a sling, I usually wear a v-neck shirt and pull the shirt down for nursing. I use the sling tail to cover my breast up to about the baby's mouth, so that I can still clearly see her face and check her breathing and position frequently.



It is *never* safe to completely cover your baby while she is nursing. It doesn't matter how many times you've done it, there is always potential for something to go wrong. Unfortunately, babies have smothered (even outside of slings) while breastfeeding (their mothers thought they were just sleeping), so you really need to be able to see what's going on. It's one thing to be discreet while you're nursing, but please put safety before modesty!

When you are done breastfeeding, even if she has gone to sleep, bring the baby back up into a more vertical position, like the cuddle hold, to minimize the risk of suffocation.

If your baby is crying in the sling...

- **It's always best to try something new with a baby when she's well-rested and just fed.** I recommend practicing using the sling with a heavy, baby-sized object before trying it with your child. The more confident you are when using it, the less anxiety your baby will pick up! It's also very helpful to try the sling with someone who knows how to use one at hand to guide you. La Leche League meetings are a great source of experienced babywearers, or you may have a Babywearing International group near you.
- If you have tried the above and your baby still doesn't seem happy in the sling, **it may be that she doesn't like the position you are using.** None of my babies liked the cradle hold for anything but nursing. They would cry if placed in a cradle hold, and if I didn't know any better, I might have assumed they just didn't like the sling. However, once I tried different holds -- particularly the upright hold -- they were much happier. Most babies just like to be upright.
- **Some babies will cry no matter what.** Stephen was colicky when he was new (and that didn't really clear up until I eliminated dairy from my diet, when he was about 4 months old), and so sometimes he also cried in the sling. However, I felt much better about his crying when I was actually holding him, in the sling or in arms, than I did allowing him to cry alone. Even though he was crying, at least he was with me. It is possible that some babies just don't like slings, and may do better with a different style of carrier. However, I would explore all the different holds before giving up, and if all else fails, wait a couple of months -- babies change so quickly! A baby who hates the cradle hold at 2 months may love a hip carry when he's 8 months, so don't give up on a ring sling too soon.

Caring for your baby sling:

I take great pride in the craftsmanship of my slings, and sew each one as though I would be using it myself. As such, I am confident that my slings will stand up ably to normal use. However, the following precautions are always necessary:

- Please examine the ring attachment each time you use the sling to insure that the stitching is secure.
- Also keep in mind that *with heavy use and frequent washing, nearly every fabric will break down with time.*
- If you're using an older sling (particularly a used one) or one made with a delicate material, please look it over each time before using it.
- **Any heavily worn spot may tear when stressed, so please discontinue use if your sling develops a worn spot, tear, or hole. Failure to do so may result in serious injury to your child.**

Cotton, linen, tencel, and blends can be washed on cold and machine-dried on low. Silk should be hand-washed, or washed on delicate and hung to dry. Expected shrinkage is accounted for in your sling's length.

Questions about wearing your SBP sling?

Please email me at info@sleepingbaby.net. (If these directions were given to you with a different brand of sling, please contact them for help.) These directions are also available on my website at <http://www.sleepingbaby.net/wearing/>

The best babywearing resource on the web is <http://www.thebabywearer.com/> -- the place for everything babywearing!

Video instructions (by other users) are available on YouTube:

(I didn't create these videos. I think they are the best in the bunch, and recommend following them. Many thanks to their creators!)

Threading a sling (by Zolowear): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQVNfj83Jyg>

Upright newborn (by Peppermint): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6ypuV8oX6o>

Upright newborn, with breastfeeding (by Peppermint): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcZm-4uxV4I>

Upright older baby, legs out (by Zolowear): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bkb9vZklVpk>

Cradle hold for newborns, opposite rings (by Zolowear): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvyQE5ij-os>

Cradle hold for newborns, ring side (by Zolowear): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maxgVnf64TY&NR=1>

Kangaroo carry (by Peppermint): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmAXmvrCxFg>

Hip carry (by Peppermint): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sM_0IEISvNU

If you're on YouTube, find the Zolowear and Peppermint channels -- they have many more helpful videos. I hope to make videos some day, but for now, these two great ladies have the best ones.