

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 cuddle hold -- they were much happier. Some 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. And then again, it's 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. 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. This should take years with a sturdy fabric, but 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 sling?

Please email me at info@sleepingbaby.net. The best babywearing resource on the web is <http://www.thebabywearer.com/> -- the place for everything babywearing!

These directions are also available on my website at <http://www.sleepingbaby.net/wearing/>



Wearing Your Ring Sling
Jan Heitzler, Sleeping Baby Productions

READ AND UNDERSTAND THESE INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE USING YOUR SLING.

Safe use of any baby carrier depends on the user.
Always put your baby's safety first.

SAVE THESE INSTRUCTIONS for future reference, and pass them along to any second-hand users if you sell or give away the sling.

Always keep these safety instructions in mind:

- **The sling is intended for carrying children from their full-term birth until 35 pounds.** However, your own body may have different limitations. Do not attempt to 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.
- Your sling should always be snug against your child's body.
- **NEVER cover your child's face with your sling.**
- **Newborns and small infants are at risk for positional asphyxia.** The weight of your child's head should be supported and 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://www.thebabywearer.com/articles/HowTo/Positioning.pdf>
- Except when the baby is breastfeeding, you should be able to easily kiss the top of his head. **When breastfeeding, you should be able to see his face at all times.**
- **A baby carrier should NEVER be used as a child safety seat.** This sling may not be used as a carseat, while riding a bicycle, or using other moving equipment.
- **Do not use your sling during tasks that may injure your child,** such as while operating heavy machinery, participating in sports, or doing anything that could cause harm to the child or cause the child to fall out of the carrier.
- **Do not use the sling near open flames or high heat,** as the fabric is not fire-retardant or -resistant, and neither is your baby!
- **Be aware of the sling tail position:** with a longer tail, it is advisable to tuck the tail into the body of the sling, throw it over your shoulder, or wrap it around the rings, so you do not trip over the tail or otherwise become entangled in it.

With all those precautions in mind, also remember that a baby sling is a terrific tool that can help you greatly in daily life; it just needs to be used carefully. Just like riding a bicycle, you need to be safe while you're enjoying the ride, but don't let it keep you from enjoying the ride!



Threading the sling:

First, make sure the sling is not twisted. Examine the rings to make sure they're securely sewn in each time you use the sling, as they will be holding the weight of your child.



Keeping the fabric neatly spread, hold the rings and pull the fabric through both of them from the underside of the sling. Make sure the sling fabric does not twist as you pull it through. The edges of the sling should be on the outside.



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 (left), making sure the fabric isn't folded within the rings. Pull the fabric out about 3" from between the rings, and fan it out as much as possible. Then pull it back through the rings until it's snug.



Threading completed. The fabric should be tight through the upper and lower rings (right).



Putting on the Sling:

Examine the sewing around the rings each time you use the sling, as that stitching will be holding the weight of your child.

Decide on which side you want to wear the sling. Most use the shoulder of their dominant hand.

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 in front of you as shown, from the bottom of the rings, not back over your shoulder.

Bring the sling over your head, keeping the rings close to your shoulder and putting your other arm through the sling, like a sash or an arm sling.

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.



"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.

Start with the rings in corsage position, with the bottom edge brought up slightly to make a pouch on the inside, and hold your baby on your chest, facing outwards.



With one hand, 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 everything is inside the fabric 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.



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.



Hip carry:

This is terrific for older babies all the way up through toddlerhood. Depending on the size of your baby, you will probably be able to start hip carrying her between 6 and 9 months. Sophia was three in these photos ☺



Tighten up the bottom of the sling to make a pouch for her to sit in. 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 (a little trickier for toddlers; you'll need to bend their legs and tuck them in).

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.



Cuddle (tummy-to-tummy) hold:

This is great for babies of any age. The chest-to-chest contact is comforting and soothing, and many babies prefer being upright to lying down in the cradle hold. You can also nurse in this position once the baby has good head control.



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



Hold the baby on your shoulder, opposite the rings.

Slide her into the body of the sling, keeping a hand on her bottom for security.



For small babies, I suggest bending their legs a bit, so they're "frogged" in the sling, and keep their feet inside the sling. (The picture at right shows how the legs will be inside the sling, for illustrative purposes.)



For bigger babies, the legs should be spread apart and straddle you as much as possible, as though they're riding a horse. That's best for their hip development, and keeps the baby from slipping down in the sling.



The baby's knees should always be higher than his bottom. In addition to being safer, this also keeps the sling from cutting into the backs of his 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.



Tighten the sling by pulling the upper and lower edges of the tail. The bottom should be nice and snug, so that it cups around the baby; she should be "sitting" in the sling, like a hammock, rather than just pressed up against your body by the tension in the sling. Newborns can have their legs tucked in, as shown at left. The body of the sling should be quite snug, to keep her from arching back. His head should always be close enough for you to kiss in this position.



Nursing in the cuddle hold:

You can easily nurse a baby with head control in the cuddle hold; just loosen the sling enough to lower the baby's head so it's 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. This is similar to nursing in a hip carry; a smaller baby would simply be brought up higher on your chest.



Be sure that the sling doesn't slide off your shoulder and toward your neck, as this may lead to back and neck injury. Our pleated shoulder is designed to help prevent such movement of the sling shoulder. Spread the material over the ball of your shoulder. 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 spread out evenly over your back.



Having the fabric **spread evenly over your back** is important for your comfort! The picture at left shows the fabric all bunched up and against the user's neck. *This is horribly uncomfortable! Don't let it happen to you!* It should look like the photo above.

Before you put the baby in, pull the tail of your sling to tighten it. There should be just enough room to allow you to put the baby in; with a stretch fabric, that can be quite snug. Place your non-dominant arm in the sling and tighten the pouch around your arm to help find the right position. It is much easier to adjust a sling if it is adjusted in this manner. This also keeps the rings from moving down your chest as well.



Threading/adjusting difficulties:

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, as shown at left.
- **Some fabrics are more difficult to adjust than others.** Unwashed silk, medium-weight twills, and thick fabrics can all be tricky to adjust even when the fabric is spread out well in the rings. Use and frequent washing will soften the fabric, but the key ingredient is patience. Adjust a small section of the sling at a time. One of the benefits of a ring sling is that each part of the sling is individually adjustable, so if you need the bottom edge tightened, you can pull on the outside edge of the tail; and if you need the top edge tightened, you pull on the inside edge of the tail.
- **Take a few minutes to practice** before putting the baby in the sling. 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 she's in, the better.** If you find that you need to adjust it once she's in, support her with your hand or 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!**



Cradle hold:

This position is best for infants and small babies without good head control. It is among the easiest for nursing. However, many babies don't like this position, so don't give up on your sling if yours is one of them!

Always remember that your baby's airway needs to be straight: her chin should never rest on her chest. If your baby seems swallowed up in the fabric or has difficulty breathing due to being too scrunched up, fold up a receiving blanket and place it behind your baby's body before you put him in the sling. When he is in the sling, his body should not be parallel to the edges, but rather at about a 45 degree angle to them.

Decide on which side you want his head to rest. If you are petite, you will probably have an easier time with his head on the side opposite the rings. If you are larger like me, you may prefer to have his head on the same side as the rings.

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 part of the tail that corresponds to that edge (if your sling isn't twisted, it will be the outside edge of the tail). You may wish to start with the rings a little bit higher than the corsage position, as they can move down when you tighten the sling later.



If you want his head on the side opposite the rings, cradle him with your opposite arm, just as you would if you weren't wearing the sling. Open the sling with your other hand, and slip the baby into the pouch with your arm still around his. Keep supporting his head if he is a newborn.



Supporting her head with the hand on the same side as the rings, 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.



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; semi-sitting is similar to the cradle hold, but with the baby sitting up rather than lying down.



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. At first, keep your arm inside the sling, supporting the baby's head as you would when nursing without the sling. Once your baby has better head control, and you're more comfortable with the sling, you can put your arm in the sling when getting latched on, then take it out once the baby is latched on correctly. Having even one hand free (as the sling will take most of the baby's weight) can be a major help when you're newly post-partum and trying to get things done! For more tips, see <http://www.thebabywearer.com/forum/viewforum.php?f=5>

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. It is a good idea to 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 tail to cover up, if you desire. However, even without this, it's quite possible people won't know what you're doing: I've had several people come right up to me and ask to see the baby, not realizing she was nursing. If people expect to see a sleeping baby, they tend to ignore the possibility that she is eating!

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



"Football" hold for nursing:

For nursing in the football hold (especially helpful after a c-section), start with the rings high on your shoulder. Place the baby in a cradle hold, with her head about 8-12" from the rings (depending on your size and build -- smaller women will need less distance than larger women). The goal is for her head to end up at breast level when she is shifted backwards in the next step.

Hold the rings with your ring hand and support the baby's weight with your other hand. Gently pull the rings down at the same time you move the baby around towards your back. The rings should end up in corsage position and the baby's head in a good position for nursing.

