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baby WEARING

Suggestions for Carrying Your Baby: A Chiropractic Perspective

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There has been much interest in the media about carrying our babies. Outside of the variety of car seats (being awkwardly used to carry the baby) and the traditional stroller, many parents are now opting to “wear” their babies.

Numerous baby carriers are now available to choose from. In general, parents are looking for greater insight in choosing the methods of carrying their infants. Here is some insight from the chiropractic perspective.

Structure Determines Function

In chiropractic we frequently say, “structure determines function;” primarily, the spine determines the function of the nervous system. In chiropractic we recognize that the nervous system controls all body systems. Therefore, a nervous system stressed by a compromised structure will affect the body’s overall ability to be healthy. One significant way our spinal structures become impaired is through irregular, repetitive postures. New parents need to be aware that the means they choose to carry their babies has postural effects on both themselves and their children.

Baby Carrying Overview

Car seats are for the car! The frequent use of car seats as carriers outside of the car are known to cause undue postural distortions to both the mother and baby. Just watch a mother struggling to remove the seat from the car—it is almost impossible to get directly in front of it when lifting it from car and the torsion and twisting to the spine during this struggle spells potential injury. Once she finally gets the seat out of the car, her body posture is forced to lean

to the side she is carrying the seat on. As the baby gains weight, this task becomes more and more difficult. Once again, this repeated spinal stress could lead to injury.

Strollers seem to be most convenient for the mother’s body, but they do not allow contact between mother and baby. It is well known and documented that close contact between baby and parent is important for babies’ physical, emotional, social, and neurological development.

The phrase “baby wearing” is being used to describe the revived custom of carrying infants in cloth carriers on the parent’s body. There are numerous benefits to baby wearing for both the parents and the infant. From a chiropractic wellness perspective, we recognize that baby wearing contributes to a healthy neurological development for the baby in many ways. Two of the most significant benefits are parent–baby contact and varied baby positioning.

The importance of parent–baby contact

Numerous psychological groups are encouraging a return to baby wearing because of the effects that constant motion and touch have on the neurological and emotional development of the baby. Researchers are documenting the importance of the continued contact and motion offered by baby carrying. A baby spends nine months in the womb experiencing constant motion, warmth, and physical contact with the mother. Separating the infant into an apparatus where



the baby cannot feel, smell, and touch the mother is a stressful, alarming change of environment for the baby. Neurological development is often impaired under stressful situations.

The importance of varied baby positions

Ever since the “Back to Sleep” program, which advocates placing babies on their backs to reduce the incidence of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), babies have spent more time on their backs than ever before. Combined with the additional use of strollers, infant seats, car seats, and other similar reclining carriers, doctors of chiropractic are noticing a significant increase in plagiocephaly, a condition of flattened portions of the infant’s cranium. Since an infant’s head is so soft and impressionable by position, it is vital that parents offer numerous positions for the baby during waking and carrying hours.

A flattened head is more than a cosmetic concern. It adds to cranial distortions and, therefore, neurological compromise for the infant. Additionally, back-lying seat carriers do not help infants develop and strengthen their neck muscles. Once again, structure is being affected and therefore function will be compromised as well.

With all of these postural considerations in mind, the carriers of choice are baby slings, sacks, pouches, and wraps. There are numerous carriers to choose from. Each has its own unique

design. Because baby wearing involves carrying the baby, there are postural considerations for both the parent and the baby.

Considerations for the Mother

The hormone relaxin may remain in your system up to nine months after delivery. So, postural adaptations may adversely affect your spinal joints while trying to perform new activities such as carrying your baby. You need to be sensitive to what your body tells you while using a carrier for your child. Do certain areas of your neck, back, hips, or shoulders become uncomfortable? Do you feel specific back muscles tighten regularly? Do you feel a general fatigue after carrying your baby? These questions will help you recognize if you are placing undue stress on your spine from infant carrying. Spinal stress will eventually affect nerve system function and it is important to recognize minor discomforts before they accelerate into bigger problems.

Regular chiropractic check-ups are a must during this period to help you maintain a healthy spine and nervous system. As the baby’s weight increases, your spinal stress increases as well. You can optimize your body’s ability to adapt with regular chiropractic care. Your doctor of chiropractic can assist you in selecting carrying postures that support your regular, postpartum chiropractic adjustments.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHOOSING A SOFT-BODY CARRIER:

Does the carrier offer various carrying positions for the baby on the wearer? (Front, sides, back?)

Does the carrier offer numerous positions for the baby: forward-facing, chest-facing, vertical, horizontal, legs-folded, straight, or frog-like position? (A carrier with limited positions for the child will affect your baby's postural development.)

How long will the carrier accommodate the child's growth and postural development? For several months, the entire first year, into the toddler years?

Can the child be transferred from one wearer to another without disturbing the baby?

How comfortably can a sleeping baby be laid down or removed from the carrier without waking?

Can the baby be breastfed while being carried?

Is the carrier easily cleaned?

Does the carrier require the wearer to support the baby with one hand or does the wearer have both hands free?

Can the baby be put into all carrying positions by the wearer alone, or is another person's help necessary?

Is the weight of the baby evenly distributed for the wearer's comfort while using the carrier?

Does the carrier cause repetitive stress and postural compensations to one area of the wearer's spine?

Considerations For the Baby

A chiropractic exam right at birth will help determine if there are any spinal misalignments contributing to potential postural deviations. Addressing these issues as early as possible with specific chiropractic adjustments can prevent abnormal developments of the spine and cranium.

For continued support in the care of your infant's spine and nervous system, your family chiropractor will discuss variations of postures for your baby's optimal development as well. This includes sleep, play time, breastfeeding, and baby-carrying positions. Incorporating proper baby positioning and carrying early on will offer your child the best potential for normal, healthy, structural development.

Choosing a single carrier that offers maximum diversity with all of these considerations is not easy. It is therefore advisable that parents have a variety of carriers on hand for various stages of baby development, weight gain, and mutual comfort for parent and child. Parents should also vary the use of their carriers on a daily basis. Alternating carriers and maintaining awareness of postures will offer both parent and baby the maximum benefits of baby wearing.

For references and additional information about the author and topic, please visit: www.icpa4kids.org/research/references.htm

Discover our baby carriers

Did you know that Baby Wearing is an excellent attachment asset that provides your baby with a strong sense of security and confidence, positively influencing social and affective skills throughout her life? And it also improves her neurobiological development, reinforces neck and back muscles and helps her to find her balance.

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