

Slings and carriers - the research

Adult-worn slings and carriers (AWSC) have been widely used across cultures and throughout history to support close contact between parent and infant while maintaining mobility¹.

AWSC offer numerous benefits for both parents and children. They facilitate an infant and parent's need for close contact¹. One research group's studies involving adolescent mothers and their infants have found positive associations between AWSC use, improved bonding, and secure attachment²⁻⁴. AWSC also allow parents to carry out daily activities while still meeting their infant's needs⁵. In addition, two studies reported small but significant improvements in parental mental health associated with AWSC use^{6,7}.

A recent systematic review identified eleven studies examining the risks of AWSC. Although AWSC-related injuries and deaths were rare, two primary risks emerged: falls and asphyxiation. Infants may fall out of AWSC, and caregivers themselves may fall while carrying an infant. Factors contributing to an increased risk of falls included product appropriateness and design, product condition, and how the product was used¹.

The literature on positional asphyxia highlights that young infants, particularly those under four months, are especially vulnerable due to weak neck muscles and large, heavy heads. When an infant cannot adequately support or control their head in an upright position, the head may fall forward, forcing the chin onto the chest and potentially occluding the airway. To mitigate this risk, recommendations include keeping the infant's face visible, ensuring the mouth and nose remain unobstructed, maintaining the infant in an upright position, and repositioning the infant after feeding¹.



References

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Frequently asked questions

What does the research show?

Adult-worn slings and carriers help parents keep babies close while staying mobile and can improve bonding, attachment, and even parental mental health. Although injuries are rare, the main risks involve falls and breathing problems, especially in babies under four months who have weak neck muscles. Babies are safest when their face is visible, their nose and mouth are clear, they are kept upright, and they are repositioned after feeding. It is important to follow the manufacturer's instructions, to reduce the risk of harm.

Are baby slings safe?

Although there is no reliable evidence linking slings directly to sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), there have been a number of accidents worldwide where babies have died while being carried in a sling. Usually when they were very young.

These accidents usually happen when a baby's airway is blocked, either because their chin is resting on their chest or their mouth and nose are covered by the parent's skin or clothes. Following the TICKS guidance from The Consortium of UK Sling Manufacturers and Retailers can help you make sure your baby can breathe easily, and is not overheating.

When wearing a sling or baby carrier, remember:

- Tight.
- In view at all times.
- Close enough to kiss.
- Keep chin off the chest.
- Supported back.

What is the key takeaway for families?

Many caregivers find carriers and slings beneficial, for them and for baby. Remember to follow TICKS guidelines and the manufacturer's instructions when using slings and carriers, to keep your baby as safe as possible.