

# PURCHASING A CARRIER

## Introduction

I knew before I gave birth to my daughter that I'd be a "babywearer." It seemed the most logical thing to me: strap the baby on and go about my life. I was a busy lady before baby, and I fully intended to stay a busy lady after. I didn't do a lot of looking, but Moby wraps were ubiquitous in the area at the time, so I found those and purchased one. I also was given a Baby Bjorn as a gift, so I tucked both away and anxiously awaited the arrival of my little Peanut.

She arrived a week early, and far too teeny for the Bjorn (starting at 8 pounds? What do you do until then?). My husband and I learned the Moby fairly quickly, and Ryan and I spent many, many hours strapped together, wandering around the house, the mall, and downtown Kirkland. As she got a little bigger, and the weather hotter, we tried the Bjorn, thinking that less fabric might mean better comfort. Except that, at 10 pounds now, it was killing me. The straps dug in, and it didn't seem quite right that Ryan was dangling by her crotch.

I started doing some research and discovered slings...I was so excited! Fabulous prints, less fabric than a Moby, more support than a Bjorn, and it looks pretty stylish. What more could a girl want?

And thus begins my babywearing journey...I've since discovered every other type of carrier, and given birth to another little girl, Finleigh. I've met so many wonderful people along the way, gotten so much great advice, and opened my own business. I hope I can help you begin your own babywearing journey.

**~Katy**

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*Edited by Katy Afruma, December 2010*

# Which Type of Carrier?

## Ring Sling



Compared to a pouch, a ring sling does take longer to learn. However, despite the learning curve, ring slings do have a few advantages over a pouch: they are easier to breastfeed in, the tail makes a great nursing cover-up or blanket, they are more adjustable and they offer better head support for a sleeping child.

*Pictured: ZoloWear Ring Sling*

## Asian-style Carrier



Asian-style carriers distribute the child's weight across both shoulders, your waist and upper body and are going to be more comfortable when carrying an infant for long periods of time or carrying a heavy child. Mei tais are a popular type of Asian-style carrier.

*Pictured: Kozy Mei Tai*

## Soft-Structured Carrier



These are mei tai inspired carriers with buckles, padded shoulder straps and a padded, stiff waist/hip belt. They distribute the child's weight evenly across the hips and shoulders. They are adjustable for a variety of caregivers. The straps and buckles make these quick to put on and adjust with a wiggly baby.

*Pictured: Infant Patapum*

## Wrap



Wraps are another type of two-shouldered carrier that is comfortable to wear for long periods of time and with heavier children. Essentially long pieces of fabric, wraps are the most versatile of baby carriers, but have the steepest learning curve. Stretchy wraps are easier to learn, but have a lower weight limit than woven wraps.

*Pictured: EllaRoo Wrap*

Depending on the length of time you plan on carrying your child, it's nice to have a ring sling plus an Asian-style and/or wrap because each are useful in different situations. A ring sling is terrific for quick trips to the store or around the house when the child(ren) want up and down. A Pikkolo, mei tai or wrap is useful for extended carries like grocery shopping, hiking or when caring for a sick child.

### More Information

For additional information on choosing a carrier go to [www.thebabywearer.com](http://www.thebabywearer.com). Scroll down the home page until you reach "How this site can help you with babywearing." If you click on "Choosing a Baby Carrier" it will bring up a page of different articles. A few examples are: "Babywearing for Dads" (this article is for moms too), "Babywearing while pregnant" and information on wearing preemies.

Independent carrier reviews written by parents are only available to site members, as are the helpful question & answer forum and chat. It's free and none of your information is shared when you create a login name and password in order to fully access this site. Some of the reviews may be helpful because they discuss why a certain carrier did, or did not, work for a certain person because of body type, etc.

## Where to Purchase

### Locally

Some local stores and distributors include:

Name	Brands/types available	Location
REgarding Peanut <a href="http://www.regardingpeanut.com">www.regardingpeanut.com</a>	Ring Slings, Mei Tais, Wraps, SSCs	Kirkland & vicinity
Cozy Baby Boutique <a href="http://www.CozyBabyBoutique.com">www.CozyBabyBoutique.com</a>	Moby Wraps, Ergos, Ring Slings	Woodinville
Evergreen Hospital Family/Maternity Boutique	Moby Wrap, Maya Ring Slings, Boba, Ergo, Sleepy Wrap	Kirkland @ Evergreen Hospital
Birth and Beyond <a href="http://www.birthandbeyond.com">www.birthandbeyond.com</a>	Ring Slings, Mobys, Ergos, Mei Tais	Seattle – Madison Park
Attached to Baby	Ring Slings, Wraps, Mei Tais, SSCs	Seattle – North end

### Online

A wide variety of carriers are available through online stores and directly from manufacturer's web sites.

For those interested in looking at several different carriers there are several online stores that stock a variety of types and brands. These online stores can also offer suggestions on which carrier to purchase as well as fit and fabric questions.

When buying online, it's a good idea to check independent reviews of the maker, especially when shopping for carriers on eBay. If you buy a cheap sling from an unknown maker, you could not only have an uncomfortable babywearing experience, but also put your child at risk.

For store listings and independent reviews, go to [www.thebabywearer.com](http://www.thebabywearer.com) and click on "product directory."

Attached to Baby [www.attachedtobaby.com](http://www.attachedtobaby.com), is a reputable online store with great selection and customer service.

### **Used/ Lower Price**

For those of you who do not want to pay full price, the FSOT (For Sale or Trade) forum at [www.thebabywearer.com](http://www.thebabywearer.com) is a great place to get new and gently used carriers. Lots of moms clean out their stash either because the carrier doesn't fit, they found a fabric they like better or they just have too many carriers.

[www.attachedtobaby.com](http://www.attachedtobaby.com) has a rotating stock of discounted carriers, many of which have only been tried on briefly and returned, so they are still in excellent condition.

Check with your local retailers as well, many of them also have discounted, slightly used carriers for a great deal. Craigslist is also a good place to look for used carriers. Just make sure any fabric carriers are in good condition, with no stitching coming loose or fabric tearing.

### **Make Your Own**

For those of you that can sew, there is a "Do It Yourself" forum on [www.thebabywearer.com](http://www.thebabywearer.com) with instructions for making your own pouch, ring sling, mei tai, etc. I have experience making my own, and can also help you with this.

Sleeping Baby Productions also offers free patterns and detailed instructions for making your own carriers, including tips on selecting the right fabric and quality materials, at [www.sleepingbaby.net/jan/Baby/](http://www.sleepingbaby.net/jan/Baby/)

### **What NOT to Buy**

Please do *not* go to Wal-Mart, Babies-R-Us or a consignment store and purchase an inexpensive and/or mass produced carrier. These carriers may be budget priced but they are also often budget designed, only useful for a very short period of time and some are even unsafe (suffocation risk or so poorly designed that baby would be in danger of falling out). Also, be very careful purchasing carriers on eBay or etsy.com. Especially with mei tais, you usually get what you pay for, and a used "brand name" carrier may be a better deal than a "brand new" cheap carrier on eBay. Keep in mind, a fabric baby carrier is going to help you hold your most precious possession – your child. You will want to invest in a carrier that will not only be safe and comfortable but also be *the* piece of baby gear you will be able to use for years to come.

## Ring Slings

### **Unpadded slings**

**Sleeping Baby Productions, [www.sleepingbaby.net](http://www.sleepingbaby.net)** Very reasonably priced, quality slings. Many fabric options and add-ons including zippered pocket, snap-on pouch, and/or Snapstrap. Overlapping pleated shoulder is very comfortable and easy to use.

**Sakura Bloom**, [www.sakurabloom.com](http://www.sakurabloom.com) Machine washable, double layer dupioni (silk) or linen slings. Silk slings are reversible. Gathered shoulder.

### **Lightly Padded Slings**

**Maya Wrap**, [www.mayawrap.com](http://www.mayawrap.com) Made of Guatemalan, hand loomed fabrics. The new lightly padded Maya with zippered pocket is an easy to use sling that is widely loved. Instructional DVD included.

### **Buying a Ring Sling**

When choosing a ring sling the size will refer to how long the sling is. If you take a tape measure and loosely loop it from one shoulder, down to your hip, then around your back, returning to your shoulder, (like a Miss America sash) you will get an approximate idea of how much fabric you will need in the ring sling. (Remember baby will take up space as well.) What is left will be tail. For example, if you measure 52" around, and the sling is 70", the tail will be *approximately* 18" long.

For those of you interested in a ring sling for carrying a heavy toddler or child the most comfortable fabrics are single or double layer silks or German woven wraps that have been "slingified," or converted to slings. "Slingified" wraps can be found on the FSOT (For Sale or Trade) board on TheBabywearer.com or a wrap can be sent to Sleeping Baby Productions for a sling conversion.

### **Ring Sling Wearing Instructions**

**Sakura Bloom**, [www.sakurabloom.com](http://www.sakurabloom.com) features many amazing videos to help you learn to use a ring sling.

**Sleeping Baby Productions**, [www.sleepingbaby.net](http://www.sleepingbaby.net), has good instructions with still photos.

## Asian-Style Carriers

### **Mei Tais**

**BabyHawk**, [www.babyhawk.com](http://www.babyhawk.com) Medium sized, square bodied mei tai. Straps a little shorter than most mei tais, but various body sizes and strap lengths are available. Options include: one or two pockets, toy ring, and minkee (fuzzy, soft lining) and padded, flip-up headrest.

**CatBird Baby**, [www.catbirdbaby.com](http://www.catbirdbaby.com) Medium bodied. Has a cinch strap to narrow the bottom of the carrier so baby can have legs out. Shoulder straps are more vertical which makes this mei tai an especially good fit for a parent with small and/or sloping shoulders.

**Kozy**, [www.kozycarrier.com](http://www.kozycarrier.com) The "gold standard" and one of the most popular mei tais. Large body. May need to roll the bottom in order to use with a newborn or small child. Canvas body and straps. Small pocket at the end of the waist strap for a credit card, etc. Pocket option on the mei tai body. Very supportive carrier for a heavy toddler or older child. Some petite mommas (under 5'2") find the large, tall body on the Kozy overwhelming.

## Soft Structured Carriers

**Beco**, [www.ecobabies.com](http://www.ecobabies.com) Detachable sleeping hood. Available in designer fabrics. Body is small which makes it a better fit for newborns to children less than 3 years of age. Recommended optional infant insert to use for babies without head control.

**Ergo**, [www.ergobabycarrier.com](http://www.ergobabycarrier.com) Sleeping hood. Small, zippered pocket on the body of the carrier. Recommended optional infant insert to use for babies without head control. Attachable accessories include a backpack and small waist pack.

**Pikkolo**, [www.catbirdbaby.com](http://www.catbirdbaby.com) Detachable sleeping hood. Solid and print fabric choices. Variable body width allows for baby to face forward and still gets wide enough to carry a larger child. Memory foam padding in the straps makes it comfortable for the wearer for long term.

## Buying an Asian-Style Carrier

A mei tai has very few sizing constraints, which makes it an especially good choice for two different-sized parents who want to use the same carrier.

A soft-structured carrier has a shorter learning curve (buckles instead of tying) however it has to be adjusted for each user. Another limitation of soft structured carriers is that they are often not a good fit for parents that are not a “medium build”. Petite parents (generally under 5’4”) often find the straps to be too long \* and plus sized parents find the straps to be too short.

## Asian-style Carrier Wearing Instructions

Learning to use an Asian-style carrier is a lot like learning to tie your shoes; it takes a while to become proficient. It is possible to use an Asian-style carrier right away however it can take a few tries until tying the carrier becomes comfortable. The best way to practice, especially before attempting a back carry with your child, is to first use a doll or stuffed animal. Once tying the carrier “feels right” then, standing over a soft surface, secure your child in the carrier.

Websites with Mei Tai instructions are:

Kozy, [www.kozycarrier.com](http://www.kozycarrier.com).

See [www.the-ergo-lady.com](http://www.the-ergo-lady.com) for soft structured carrier instructions and tips.

# Wraps

## A Word about Wraps

A wrap distributes the child’s weight across the entire upper body, which makes this type of carrier insanely comfortable, even when carrying an older child. Wraps are also extremely versatile making it possible to accomplish any carry (front, back, hip cradle, etc.), are terrific for hands free, discrete breastfeeding and, in addition, can be used as a sunshade, picnic blanket or toddler leash. If you are on a budget, or only want one carrier to do it all, a wrap could be a good choice.

That said, the down side to wraps is the size. Due to its lack of structure (after all a wrap is just a very, very long piece of fabric) most moms find a wrap to have a steeper learning curve than most any other carrier – especially for back carries. This type of carrier can also be warm to wear, especially in the summer, because of all the fabric wrapped around the upper body.

## Choosing a Wrap

**Stretchy wraps** are best for newborns or a petite child; a heavy child will stretch the wrap to a point where it isn't very supportive. A stretchy wrap is wonderful for a newborn because the wrap can be pre-tied and the baby can be popped in and out easily. Stretchy wraps include:

**Moby Wrap**, [www.mobywrap.com](http://www.mobywrap.com)

**Sleepy Wrap**, [www.sleepywrap.com](http://www.sleepywrap.com)

**"Hybrid" wraps** are slightly stretchy (easier to get child in and/or out) but also supportive enough for a larger child. Popular hybrids include:

**Wrapsody Bali Baby Stretch**, [www.gypsymama.com](http://www.gypsymama.com)

**Summer weight wraps** are made of thinner, breathable fabrics. When using a thinner wrap most parents find they get pressure points on their shoulders from carrying a heavier child (generally over the age of 2). A thinner wrap is less hot to wear but also less cushioned for the wearer. Some summer weight wraps are:

**EllaRoo**, [www.peppermint.com](http://www.peppermint.com) A medium weight wrap made of hand-woven, Guatemalan cotton.

**Wrapsody Bali Baby Breeze**, [www.gypsymama.com](http://www.gypsymama.com) Hand-dyed gauze wrap.

**German-style wraps** are especially comfortable when carrying a heavy toddler or child. Two of the more popular brands are **Didymos** and **Storchenwiege**. They are both heavier weight German wraps with a complex weave to give just the right amount of stretch/support. **Hoppediz** and **Girasol** are also fairly popular and at a slightly lower price than Didymos.

German-style wraps are available at [www.attachedtobaby.com](http://www.attachedtobaby.com) or [www.pieceofcloth.com](http://www.pieceofcloth.com).

## Wrap Wearing Instructions

See [www.wearyourbaby.com](http://www.wearyourbaby.com) for photos, video streams and tips on making your own wrap.

# Wearing a Premature Infant

Special things to consider when wearing a preemie include, but are not limited to: the types of leads the baby has, the length of time you may be allowed to wear the baby (remember that YOU are your baby's best incubator and the most comforting thing around), the size of your baby. That's about it. Probably my two favorite carriers for premature babies are the ring slings, simply because they're easy to get on and off quickly and have plenty of space to allow for reattaching leads, and the Wrapsody stretch wraps, because they're SO soft and again allow plenty of space for reattaching baby's leads. Both carriers are also great for use beyond your stay in the NICU, allowing you to use them each up to 35 pounds. I've also had success using mei tais with preemies, though I don't find them quite as supportive for very tiny, micro preemies. The ring sling and wrap are both very customizable and thus ideal for tiny babies. Soft structured carriers, like Ergo, Pikkolo, Beco and the like are NOT RECOMMENDED for premature babies (or even for term newborns). If you have one of these, please set it aside until your baby is much bigger and much, much stronger. Remember that with kangaroo care you're trying to recreate the womb as best you can, and carriers that are soft, warm and snug will do that best.