

Wear your baby safely

Carry a child correctly in a sling or carrier to reduce the likelihood of strain and discomfort

Lea Wee



In the past, every time she cradled her newborn baby girl in a sling, yoga teacher Juliana Phua felt a strain on her shoulder.

"I could not walk properly as I had to keep one hand on her all the time," she says. It was only when she stumbled on a Facebook page called Babywearing Singapore early last year that she realised she was wearing her baby wrongly.

The 34-year-old recalls: "She was hanging too low and the weight was all on my shoulders. Also, I had put her in cradle, a position which I learnt can be dangerous because it causes her chin to press against her chest and this can block her airway."

Since then, she has been carrying her daughter, now 16 months, the right way – in an upright position, with the child's knees higher than the bum so that her spine is in its natural C shape.

Ms Phua is now so comfortable baby-wearing that she even teaches and practises yoga while doing so.

Baby-wearing is the practice of wearing the baby on a sling or other baby-wearing gear.

It is said to produce happier and calmer babies,



"It was fun. I could dance with my five-month-old daughter and have a good workout too."

MS SHARIFAH FAEZA (left) on her first baby-wearing ballet class

ST PHOTOS: KUA CHEE SIONG, TIFFANY GOH

among other things. Together with co-sleeping and breastfeeding, it is a major tenet of attachment parenting, a style of child-rearing made popular in the United States by paediatrician William Sears.

In recent years, there were a few deaths related to the use of slings in Britain, the United States and Canada, prompting the US Consumer Product Safety Commission to advise caution when using slings for babies younger than four months. The deaths were mostly due to suffocation.

About 10 mums started Babywearing Singapore in late 2013 to promote safe and comfortable baby-wearing, after realising that many parents were wearing their babies wrongly. It has more than 6,400 members.

There are at least five baby-wearing mothers here who have undergone training by certified trainers from baby-wearing schools in Britain, Australia and Germany.

One of them, Ms Nur Afifah Mokhtiaruddin, 27,

who runs an online business selling custom-made ring slings, says: "Wearing a carrier is not just a matter of following instructions on a piece of paper. Some babies may have certain habits and parents need more specific instructions on how to carry them."

For instance, certain babies like to arch their back and parents need to learn to wrap them in such a way that they will not slip out easily.

Also, while soft structured carriers, which usually come with belts and buckles, are generally easier to use, non-structured carriers such as wraps and ring slings have a steep learning curve and may require more guidance.

Baby-wearing advocates advise parents to buy carriers of a good quality because cheaper designs may have buckles that break more easily.

A good sling costs from \$60 to \$80, a soft structured carrier from \$90 to \$150 and a wrap \$90 and above. A sling is usually worn over one shoulder whereas a wrap is more versatile and can be worn on one or both shoulders.

To allow parents to try the different types of carriers before they commit to a suitable one for themselves, Babywearing Singapore started an online sling library in January. Parents can rent carriers for two weeks for \$10.

Ms Afifah says some parents give up baby-wearing when their baby outgrows the carrier, but there are "toddler worthy" and even "preschooler worthy" carriers, which are usually made of tougher materials.

Dr Rajeev Ramachandran, a consultant at the division of General Ambulatory Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine from the National University Hospital, says baby-wearing is safe so long as it does not cause discomfort or injuries to the baby.

He says injuries related to baby-wearing are generally very rare here as parents are very careful with it.

Dr May Lim, an assistant professor from the Singapore Institute of Technology and a trained occupational therapist, says baby-wearing can be calm and soothing. But parents should ensure that they wear their sling correctly, even when they are in a hurry. Otherwise, it can strain their shoulders and backs.

Parents here say they are careful to ensure that they carry their baby safely in the right carrier.

Ms Debbie Wee, 28, a regional campaign services manager, and her husband, a 35-year-old marine surveyor, follow the "Ticks" rules of safe baby-wearing from the UK Sling Consortium (see below).

Ms Wee says: "We want to enjoy the benefits of baby-wearing, but in a way that is safe and comfortable for both the baby and ourselves."

She tried at least three types of carriers before deciding on a woven wrap. Her husband had a soft structured carrier custom-made for him from an overseas manufacturer as he could not find one that fits him here.

Corporate writer Chia Ying Mei, 28, is due to give birth to her first child in September, but she has already bought an ergonomic carrier – a woven wrap – for herself.

"I have hurt my back before, so I definitely want to avoid that again."

Despite her old injury, she prefers to baby-wear rather than use a stroller.

She says: "I have seen parents struggling with strollers, especially on buses, and sometimes there just isn't space for a stroller."

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Do you prefer to carry your baby in a sling or use a stroller? E-mail stlife@sph.com.sg

Wear your baby correctly

A checklist for safe baby-wearing, known popularly by the acronym Ticks, was created by the UK Sling Consortium.

Tight: Carriers should be tight enough for parents to hug their babies close to them. Any loose fabric will allow a baby to slump in the carrier, which can hinder his breathing and create a strain on the wearer's back.

In view at all times: You should be able to see your baby's face by simply glancing down. The fabric of a carrier should not close around him.



Close enough to kiss: Your baby's head should be as close to your chin as is comfortable.

Keep baby's chin off his chest: A baby should never be curled so that his chin is forced onto his chest as this can restrict his breathing.

Supported back: In an upright carry, a baby should be held comfortably close to the wearer so his back is supported in its natural position and his tummy and chest are against the wearer.

Source: UK Sling Consortium



Civil servant Siti Norlilah, 29, with her five-month-old son at a baby-wearing yoga class by Om Shiva Yoga.

Work out with baby

Every Sunday afternoon, a group of ballet students can be seen doing plies and relevés at a studio in Claymore Hill near Orchard.

This is no regular class. The dancers, mostly women, are wearing their babies in baby carriers.

Ms Debbie Wee, 28, a regional campaign services manager, who has an 18-month-old son, says: "It is like a post-natal fitness class, except that it also allows us to bond with our baby."

She roped in a professional dancer friend, Ms Cheong Zelia, to start the class last August after baby-wearing mums responded warmly to a Facebook video on baby-wearing ballet that she shared on the Babywearing Singapore page.

Baby-wearing ballet is the brainchild of American dancer and mother-of-two Morgan Castner.

Ms Wee says that unlike normal ballet, in baby-wearing ballet, the movements are very gentle and soothing. "They are done to the accompaniment of soothing music. Most babies tend to doze off by the end of the session."

There are no twirls, jumps or other high-impact moves. Each hourly session costs about \$20 and is attended by about eight to 12 parents. A baby-wearing consultant is present to ensure the mothers are wearing their babies correctly.

Personal assistant Sharifah Faeza, 30, who took her first class last Sunday, wants to go back again. "It was fun. I could dance with my five-month-old daughter and have a good workout too."

Meanwhile, a baby-wearing yoga class for eight mothers started recently at Om Shiva Yoga studio in Holland Village.

Yoga teacher Juliana Phua, 34, a member of the Babywearing Singapore Facebook page, began receiving requests from mothers to start such a class last year. She also teaches adult and child yoga as well as pre- and post-natal yoga.

She says: "Baby-wearing yoga is like a post-natal class. The poses are gentler than those in a normal adult class. But it's a bit more interactive than post-natal classes because mothers are sometimes encouraged to sing or talk to their babies."