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SAFETY ALERT

# Baby slings



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## Safety alert

Parents and carers should take care when using slings and pouches to carry babies.

Babies have suffocated while using slings. They are at risk if placed incorrectly in a sling because they do not have the physical capacity to move out of dangerous positions that block their airways.

Two positions present significant danger:

1. Lying with a curved back, with the chin resting on the chest.
2. Lying with the face pressed against the fabric of the sling or the wearer's body.

Babies who are under four months old, premature, low birth weight or having breathing difficulties appear to be at greater risk. Consult a paediatrician before using a sling with a premature baby.



# Safety tips

## What are slings?

Slings are baby carriers designed to help you carry a baby by easing the pressure on your arms and back. They are not hands-free devices. Slings do not have identified leg openings.

Several different types of wearable baby carriers are available. Fabric wrap, pouch or bag slings and framed carriers are some examples.

## Choosing a sling

- Ensure any sling you buy comes with detailed instructions for use.
- Take your baby with you when you buy a sling to ensure that the product you buy is a safe fit for you and the baby—if a sling is too large or worn incorrectly, the baby may be in danger.
- Ask for a demonstration of how to use the slings you are considering, according to the instructions that come with each sling.
- Never use products, such as bag or pouch slings, that are described as ‘womb-like’, or a ‘cocoon’, or placing the baby in a ‘foetal position’. These slings place the baby in a dangerous position with a curved back. A foetus doesn’t need straight back to breathe, but a baby does.

## Wearing a sling

- Follow instructions for use.
- When using the sling for the first time have someone to assist you.
- Lie the baby in a flat position with a straight back to ensure the baby’s chin does not rest on his or her chest.

- Ensure the baby's chin is up and away from their body, as any pressure on the chin can close the airway.
- **Ensure you can see the baby's face at all times and that the face remains uncovered by the sling or your body.**
- Put the baby in a slanted or upright position. This will give the baby a straight, flat back with head support, the chin up and the face clearly visible.

### Using the sling

- Hold the baby with at least one arm.
- Pay attention to the baby—being unsettled may indicate breathing difficulty, but a baby might have breathing difficulty and make no obvious sound or movement.
- Be alert to your own safety—slings can affect the way you move, particularly on stairs.
- Be alert for things that may fall on the baby, for example hot drinks.
- Be aware your activity may loosen the sling or the baby inside the sling.

### Regularly check the baby

Babies can be in difficulty without making a noise or movement. Take the baby out of the sling or pouch immediately if you observe these signs:

- face covered or chin tucked in
- head turned to the side
- curled into a 'C' position
- grunting, wheezing, whistling breaths
- laboured or rapid breathing
- a dusky or 'blue' tinge on the baby's skin
- 'fussiness', restlessness or squirming.

## Right and wrong positions for a baby in a sling.



### Right

Chin up;  
face visible—nose  
and mouth free.



### Wrong

Baby's face is  
covered.



### Wrong

Baby is too low.



### Wrong

Baby is hunched  
with chin touching  
chest.



### Wrong

Baby's face is  
pressed tight  
against wearer.

## For more information about safe sleeping, visit:

- [www.sidsandkids.org/safe-sleeping](http://www.sidsandkids.org/safe-sleeping)
- [www.productsafety.gov.au](http://www.productsafety.gov.au)
- [www.kidshealth.org.nz](http://www.kidshealth.org.nz)
- [www.slingbabies.co.nz](http://www.slingbabies.co.nz)

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