

PARENTING | *baby wearing*

READY TO *wear*

Keeping baby close by using a sling or carrier is as precious for parents as it is beneficial for bubs. By Alice Hansen

a mother's natural instinct is to hold her new baby close. The soft newborn scent, wide, new eyes and gentle breathing rhythms are pure joy. For most parents, this magical time is unforgettable — but shortlived. Despite the new family addition, life hurries on and demands the shift of attention back to daily routine. There are places to get to and chores to tackle. However, with baby wearing, a busy parent has the freedom to engage in everyday activities.

For new parents in particular, the transition into learning to incorporate their new arrival into daily life can be difficult. Not only does a new mother have to pick up the motherly ropes very quickly, she must also learn how to introduce her baby smoothly into her current lifestyle.

Being a new mother is as overwhelming as it is exciting, a time when everything is unknown. Can you still enjoy coffee with friends? Is it possible to work from home part-time? Will you be able to get out and enjoy the outdoors with your partner as you did before?

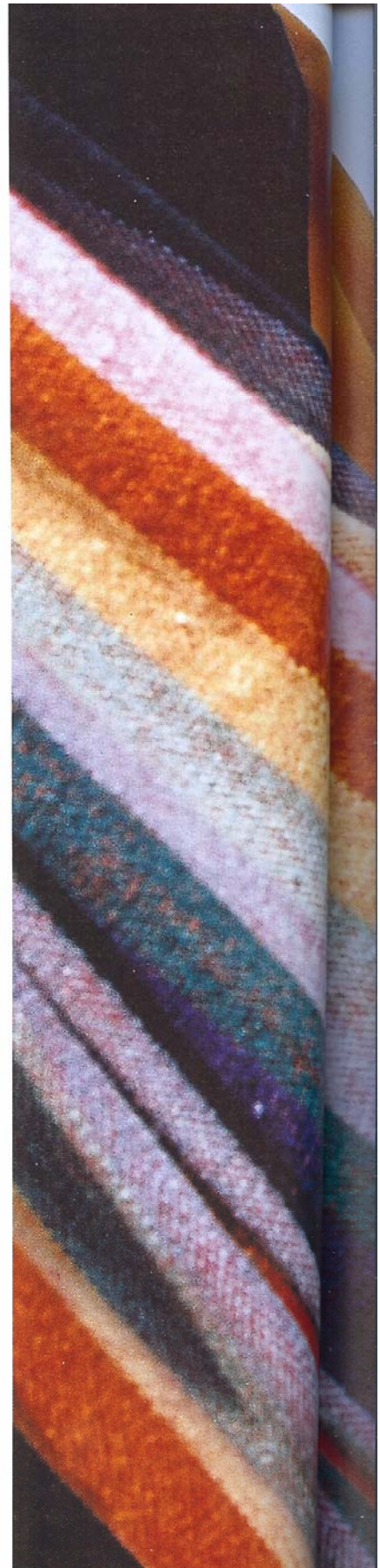
It is natural to wonder how the baby will impact on the lifestyle you have always known.

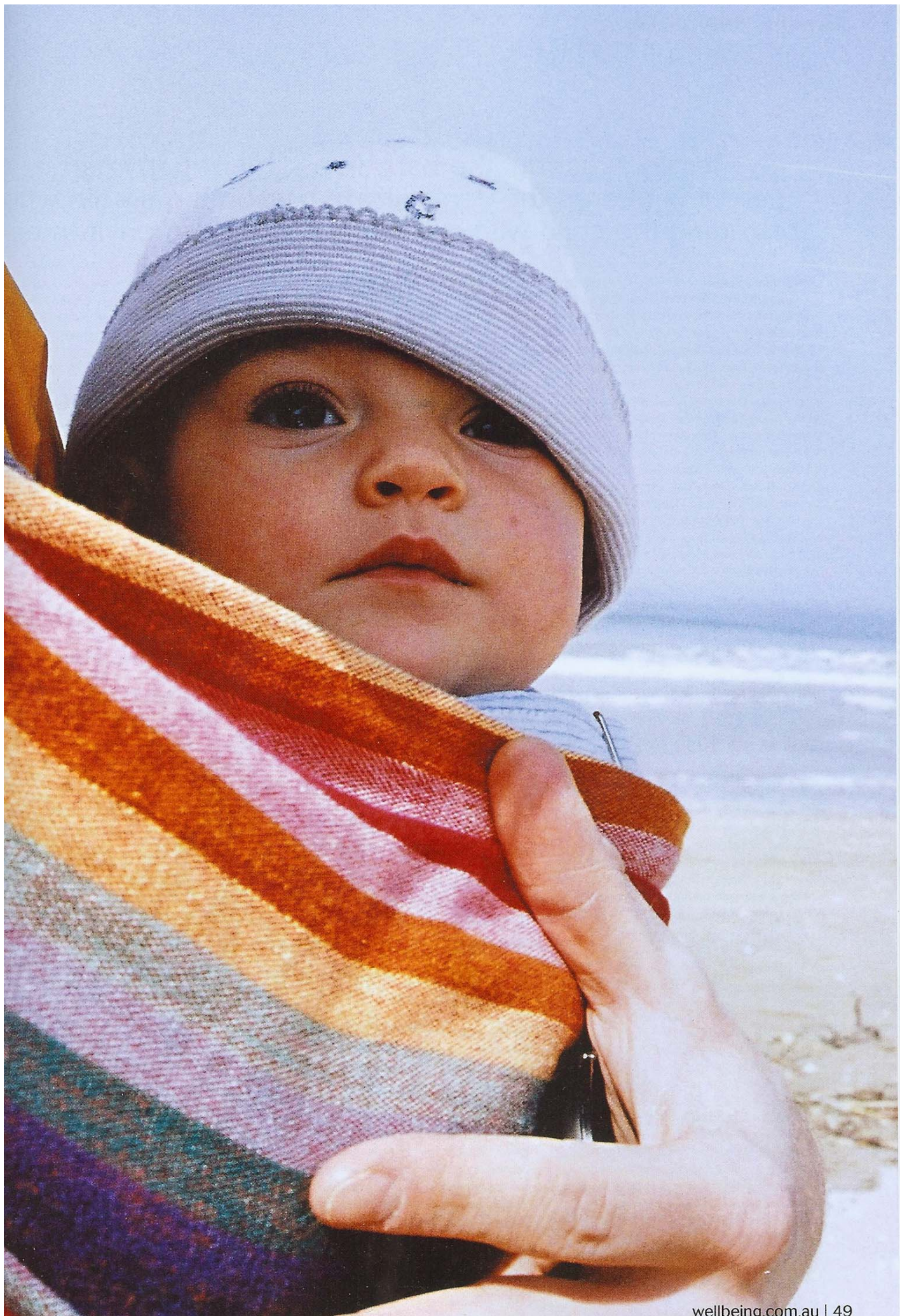
It's not selfish to consider how you're going to have time for *you* in a way that includes your baby in daily routine.

Fortunately, there is a relatively trouble-free way to include your baby in everyday life. By literally "wearing" the baby in a sling or baby carrier, a parent is offered the versatility to go about daily life while providing the child with an intimate, nurturing environment. The parent's hands and arms are free to tend to other activities while the baby remains close.

As an ancient tradition, baby wearing has been enjoyed by indigenous cultures across the world. It's still practised widely in countries such as Africa, Indonesia and South America. Babies carried in this way rarely cry and more often than not are attached to hard-working parents throughout the day.

This is known as "attachment parenting" and indigenous cultures have reaped the benefits of it for centuries. Baby wearing and the associated benefits, however, became lost to modern society for a number of reasons. The industrial revolution encouraged physical separation of mother and child and society moved toward





By literally 'wearing' the baby in a sling or baby carrier, a parent is offered the versatility to go about daily life while providing the child with an intimate, nurturing environment.

values of independence. The idea of extended families gently waned and the introduction of the pram changed the way in which parents transported their babies.

Only recently have Western cultures embraced the wisdom of baby wearing more collectively. As a result, a growing number of baby carriers and slings have become available on the world market, catering to specific needs of families' chosen lifestyles.

"It's beautiful having your child so close and having that intimate contact with them," explains mother, Anita Lincolne-Lomax. "You can read their cues more readily and, ultimately, you become the translator of your environment to your child. Babies love to experience the world from the safety and warmth of their parents' arms."

Finding the correct baby carrier or sling that's suitable for the parent and child can also aid in health benefits when fitted correctly. Trial and error might be necessary to find the ideal carrier, but it's well worth doing the research.

"We had been using a variety of slings and baby carriers, trying to find the right one for us," explains new mother, Nerida May. "However, each sling just seemed to contribute to my chronic neck pain and shoulder injuries that I received in a car accident a few years ago. Eventually, it got to the point where I could only wear our little girl for about 10 minutes before terrible pain would set in. The option we settled on shifts our baby's weight to my waist and the relief is amazing."

Not only mothers but fathers, too, can benefit greatly from baby wearing. The need for physical closeness between a father and his newborn can sometimes be overlooked. However, a father holding his baby close offers the emotional, psychological and physical connection that's vital for parent-baby bonding.

"There are countless benefits for a young baby, emotionally, psychologically and developmentally," says Lincolne-Lomax, "but as a new mother the babywearing benefits stretch far beyond the needs of the baby. Mothers have the freedom and versatility to do so much more by carrying their babies this way."

Because baby wearing is an easy way for mothers to move around with their babies, this tends to lead to a more active lifestyle. Mothers are able to go for walks, get outside in the fresh air or even run errands without the need to consider a cumbersome pram or alternative method of bringing along their babies.

In addition, baby wearing allows a mother to take her baby along with her and engage in activities that otherwise would not be possible. A walk on the beach or through the bush, for

instance, is not compatible with pram wheels. A mother able to wear her baby, however, has the ability to stroll where ever she pleases.

"I can now wear my baby and vacuum, reach high and low, do all the laundry, dance around the lounge with my little ones, go picking blueberries or hunt for insects with my boys, cook dinner and do the dishes," explains mother, Serene Allison. "My back and shoulders don't need a rest and I can forget I even have the baby. Attachment-style mothering has now become as easy as toting around a feather."

In a culture where many women move from a career to becoming a full-time mother, there can be difficulty in losing a former professional identity and moving into a more anonymous role. In some cases, this can lead to post-natal depression.

Only recently have Western cultures embraced the wisdom of baby wearing more collectively. As a result, a growing number of baby carriers and slings have become available on the world market.

New mothers can feel isolated at home with their babies and may sense loss in their own personal freedom. If it's easy for a mother to get out and engage socially with other people, she is more likely to do so.

Through baby wearing, a baby can become part of the mother's activities without constantly being the focal point of daily choices. The child can literally go along for the ride without limiting the mother's ability to engage and perform the various tasks she was accustomed to doing before the baby's birth.

Another benefit for parents include greater bonding with the infant. Through this heightened sensitivity, a parent is better equipped to attend

to cues and needs of the child instinctively. Holding the baby close, even the slightest movement or noise can be felt and noticed immediately. Not only is this beneficial to the parent, it also allows the baby to read cues and become more sensitive to his or her carrier.

As the baby grows, baby wearing develops muscle strength in the parent relative to the weight of the growing child. Parents will find themselves becoming naturally stronger and better able to carry their infant as the weight gently increases. This physical aspect enhances the parent's blood circulation, muscle strength and general fitness.

The benefits of baby wearing are extensive on an emotional level. Research indicates babies held in a sling cry 43 per cent less during the day and 51 per cent less at night. Through the presence of their mother's rhythms, babies feel safe and secure.

During the early stages of life, the familiarity of a mother's breathing, warmth and heartbeat is comforting and calming for the newborn. Through holding a baby close by way of a sling or baby carrier, the transition from womb to outside world is much gentler.

From a cognitive perspective, babies are in a position to learn more readily from the position of a sling. They can interact with their environment and people around them from their parent's arms.

In a position that's level with the parent, the baby can experience his or her new world from an equal perspective. In contrast, a baby lying or seated in a pram does not have the same perception or view and is often able to only look up toward activity or stimulus.

Babies also benefit from this mode of transport physiologically through being close to the parent and constantly touched, which stimulates growth hormones. In addition, baby wearing assists a baby's sense of balance and regulates cardiac output, respiration and circulation.

Improvements in physical and nerve strength have been discovered by developmental neurologists in mothers who are active and move constantly during pregnancy. Likewise, the same has been noted for children who are carried after birth.

Carrying a baby in a sling throughout the day also assists in the development of a baby's circadian rhythms, allowing for longer, deeper sleep cycles, which assist in brain maturation. Digestion is aided by the upright position of baby wearing, while infants who are breastfeeding have easy access to their source of nourishment.⁶

Parents may choose to carry their baby on their front during the early days to keep a close eye

on their newborn. As the child grows in size and weight, parents might feel more comfortable with a back position. Certain baby carriers can convert from the front to the back, or parents may choose to move from a sling to a more rigid style of carrier.

Where a pram or stroller creates distance between a parent and child, baby wearing offers the innate intimacy necessary for early development. The baby remains close at all times, and never needs to sense that their care-giver is out of sight or out of reach.

around and tied in knots to carry the baby. Traditional wraps have been used in many cultures because of their simple design and versatile nature. Newer styles of wraps typically have longer lengths of material and are made from woven or stretchy fabric.

Ring slings are very similar to scarves or wraps, but they include a ring that enables the wearer to adjust the carrier. Ring slings often have padded edges or rails and offer an easy carrying method for new babies.

to a school backpack. This form of carrier has been used for centuries, with modern versions that include buckles, clips and other easily adjustable tools. The baby can be worn on the front or back with these soft packs, depending on preference.

No matter whether your baby is a newborn or a small toddler, there's a baby carrier suitable for your needs and lifestyle. So why not hold your baby close and head off on that long beach walk? There's no need to leave heavy pram tracks in the sand. Both baby and parent will enjoy the versatility, freedom and closeness this timeless tradition offers.

"This nurturing way of parenting is the way many cultures have been successfully parenting for years and its comeback in the Western world shows the concept is needed, relevant and here to stay," explains founder and President of the Rebozo Way Project, Barbara Wishingrad. ☺

A father holding his baby close offers the emotional, psychological and physical connection that's vital for parent-baby bonding.

"A pram is an inanimate plastic object. It does not smell familiar; it has no breath to it or heartbeat," says Lincolne-Lomax. "There is nothing communicated through that pram to the child."

There are four main types of baby carriers available. Carrying scarves or wraps are basically rectangles of material that can be wrapped

Pouches have become increasingly popular in recent times and are designed with a seam in the middle that creates a pouch for the child to sit in. There is no need for knots or rings with this design and many are customised to fit the wearer.

The soft-pack baby carriers are rectangular or square in design and include four straps, similar

References available at www.wellbeing.com.au

Alice Hansen attended a university in the United States on a tennis scholarship, gaining a degree in Public Relations/Journalism and is now a freelance writer who is based in Tasmania and has two published books.

Glow from within



Australian Natural Medicine Breakthrough

Algotene is a whole food, natural dietary supplement maintaining beautiful glowing skin, good health and vitality.

It provides a powerful source of antioxidants and nutrients that may help reduce the risk of premature aging caused by free radicals.

Algotene helps restore vitality, maintain a healthy immune system, skin and eyes.

Boost your carotenoids and daily nutrients

Natural multi-vitamin and mineral supplement

Dunaliella salina – Whole Dried Marine Microalgae



CHC 36088-09/06

MADE IN AUSTRALIA

Available from leading health stores and pharmacies.
Use only as directed. Always read the label.



For more information please contact:
InterClinical Laboratories Pty Limited
6/10 Bradford Street, Alexandria NSW 2015
Phone 02 9693 2888 Fax 02 9693 1888
Email sales@interclinical.com.au
www.interclinical.com

TVW 6346hp