

9 THINGS I'VE LEARNED FROM NEVER USING A STROLLER

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IMAGE SOURCE: THINSTOCK

Yes, you read that right: I've never, ever used a stroller. I don't have any moral objections to buckling one's offspring into a cart on wheels, mind you. If a stroller works for you, as it does for many parents, that's great. Rather, I found babywearing to be the right decision for me and my family, and have continued to feel that way, even as my kid has gone from seven pounds to 29 and counting. I've learned a few things after two-plus years of babywearing.

1. Babywearing fosters closeness and the occasional fat lip.

Tucking a baby against your chest keeps them close. Like really, really close. Study after study has shown that infants thrive when given lots of opportunity for cuddling, and you can't get much closer than a sling or carrier. There were times in the early days when I just wore my K'tan around the house, often with Baby in it.

A toddler, on the other hand, is a different beast. Nestled into his carrier, my son will stroke his daddy's beard, take off his sunglasses, or grab his smartphone. He twirls my curls or tries to take gum out of my mouth. Anything within reach is fair game. I love that I can kiss my child when I'm carrying him. I love less the occasional fat lip I get when leaning in for a smacker right as Baby jerks his head to track an airplane in the sky.

2. Carriers can be complicated.

Over the years, my family has used a few types of carriers: one so simple a child could wear it, one with a pattern that blessedly hid all signs of spit-up, and one that requires an advanced degree in aeronautical engineering. I thought strollers could be bulky and unwieldy, but some carriers boast tons of straps and snaps and adjustable do-hickeys. Our latest carrier features a pattern of rainbow-colored French bulldogs, and matches nothing. Comfortable, it is. Fashion-forward, it is not. Make me talk like Yoda it does, especially after a long walk wearing Baby.

3. Carriers limit what you can carry.

Grab Baby, grab the carrier, and go. Talk about convenience! Without the portable storage offered by a stroller, my husband and I had to be strategic about baby gear from the beginning. After all, between us we only have four shoulders, and two are usually occupied by the carrier. Sorry to get all braggy, but our diaper bag is a thing of beauty: an old tote with a Skip Hop portable changing station, some hand sanitizer, tissues, and a baby fork and spoon. That's it. We don't have the space or strength to pack for every contingency. [Marie Kondo](#) would approve.

4. Babywearing promotes conversation.

When you've got a baby or a toddler attached to your chest, you have no choice but to talk. Before my son could communicate beyond coos and grunts, I'd describe what we were passing: there's a pigeon, there's a gray car, that's a tree, here's a fence. Now he describes things to me.

But babywearing promotes conversation among others too. Adults love to see a baby practically at eye level. I've had folks reach their hands into the carrier to stroke Baby's cheek, gabbing all the while about their kids. When we'd wear Baby facing forward, tons of people would wiggle his toes or pinch his thighs. They talk to him, they talk to me, and they smile and smile.

5. Not having a stroller is good exercise.

My son didn't go from a tiny infant into a hefty toddler overnight. The best carriers help distribute the child's weight across your torso, and my body gradually adjusts to his size as he gradually gains weight. Nevertheless, lugging him around for hours can get tiring, as it burns lots of calories.

Between babywearing and breastfeeding, I'm more or less a hunchback. To carry him, I sometimes jut my pelvis forward, and my style of breastfeeding necessitated a kind of curved shoulder thing. Fingers crossed that yoga can help restore my posture to pre-baby, or at least something less Quasimodo-ish.

6. Baby walks more.

In the hot, hot heat of a New York City summer, my kid would rather do pretty much anything than be strapped to my sweaty body. As a result, my son will walk the five or six blocks to the grocery store, to his daycare, or to the park. Sometimes he rides on his daddy's shoulders. I don't have any scientific evidence, but I feel like kids in carriers walk more than kids in strollers, paradoxical as it might sound. I regularly see 6- and 7-year-olds in strollers around my neighborhood, but never bigger kids in carriers. My conclusion? Carriers foster independence.

7. Babywearing gets messy. So messy.

Feeding a kid in a stroller is no problem. Hand her a container of crackers or cup of juice, and continue on your merry way. Feeding your kid while babywearing, on the other hand, means you'll get a chest full of crumbs or dribbles. Some women can breastfeed while babywearing; I was not one of those women. If any of my coworkers are reading this, now you know why I wore so many polka dot shirts when my son was small — to better hide the mess.

You can't really hand your kid a smartphone or magazine or set of keys to play with while babywearing, either, unless you want these things waved in your face, risking paper cuts or bruises. Instead, you have to provide the stimulation. Look, a gray car!

8. It's hell on the grandparents.

There's no way my parents or my in-laws would babywear. No way, no how. Baby is too heavy, the carrier is too cumbersome, the whole thing seems ridiculous. Clearly the hippie gene skipped a generation in my family. No doubt some grandparents might even make an argument along the lines of "in my day, we pushed a stroller uphill both ways to get anywhere." When my son gets bigger, perhaps one of his grandparents will give him a piggyback ride. Until then, my husband and I carry Baby, or we hold Baby's little hands and walk.

9. Babywearing makes you feel good.

I'll take every puffy lip or face scratch for those moments when my son lays his head against my chest, or wraps his arms around my torso and squeezes, chanting "Mommy, Mommy, Mommy." Babywearing is essentially a constant sustained hug, and I can't get enough. I will babywear until my son can no longer fit — I am addicted to the warm spread of love I feel whenever he's right there with me.

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