

CHEAT SHEET >> THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE YOU BUY

1 Know your options.

Become acquainted with the kinds of carriers.

Pouch or ring sling: A carrier that fits over one shoulder that may be able to accommodate various front, hip and back carrying positions; pouch slings are sized to fit whereas ring slings can be adjusted to accommodate different wearers.

Wrap: A carrier made of a long, singular piece of fabric that can be wrapped and tied to hold baby in various front, back and hip positions.

Soft structured: A carrier outfitted with shoulder and waist straps that's shaped to hold baby; soft structured carriers allow for front and oftentimes back and hip carrying.

Mei Tai: A traditional, Asian-style carrier that functions similarly to a soft structured carrier, but ties (rather than buckles or clips) to secure baby in place; mei tais can usually be used as front or back carriers.

Frame: A carrier worn much like a backpack that provides a roomy ride for larger babes and tots who can support themselves; frame carriers are often used for outdoor activities such as hiking.

2 Determine your needs.

Ask yourself these questions to find out which type of carrier is right for your lifestyle.

1. How soon and for how long do you intend to use the carrier? Is it important to you that the carrier is usable from birth through the toddler years?

2. In what positions (i.e., cradle/newborn, front facing in, front facing out, hip, back) would you like to be able to carry your baby? During what sorts of activities do you intend to wear your baby? Walking? Shopping? Cooking dinner?

3. How adept are you at using carrying contraptions? Are you intimidated by snaps and straps? Does twisting and tying overwhelm you? Is simplicity something that appeals to you?

3 Find your fit.

Mark the features you desire in a carrier in the first column, then use the remaining columns to compare the models you're considering and clarify which best meet your requirements.

FEATURE	IMPORTANT TO ME	OPTION 1	OPTION 2	OPTION 3
Infant insert				
Head support				
Machine washable				
Multi-person sizing: Moms and dads who both plan to use the carrier will appreciate an adjustable fit.				
Made from organic materials				
Padded straps and/or waist belt				
Weight limit: Write in your ideal weight range for a carrier and note the ranges of the carriers you're considering.				
Carry positions:				
<i>Cradle/newborn</i>				
<i>Front facing in</i>				
<i>Front facing out</i>				
<i>Hip positioning</i>				
<i>Back positioning</i>				

4. Where will you store the carrier when not in use? How will you transport it? Would you benefit from a carrier that can fit inside your diaper bag?

5. Will your partner or child care provider be using the carrier as well? If so, are you similarly sized or at opposite ends of the height and weight spectrum? Do you (or your partner) desire a carrier that's gender neutral in style?



Visit pnmag.com/carriers for reviews of our parent panel's top carrier choices.