

Babywearing For Fitness

By Philippa Bowman~ Kangatraining Instructor and owner of Nurtured Fitness

Babywearing is a wonderful way mothers can continue their daily lives and keep their babies close and happy. While you may be aware of the numerous benefits of babywearing for bonding, settling or hands free time, have you considered that babywearing can also extend to your fitness recovery journey, too. Parenthood has many demands and fitness can often be sitting at the bottom of a Mum's list of daily priorities. But now with Babywearing, you can shift your health back to the top of your list and eliminate 'Mum Guilt' by doing your fitness WITH your baby.

Joyful movement through Babywearing

Exercising and venturing out of the house for any kind of physical movement will help boost your mood, rebuild your body and increase your energy levels. Step up your wellbeing even further by planning to meet another Mum for an energising walk together and enjoy the bonus social aspect, too.

The safe babywearing check points, babywearing exercise choices, aspects to avoid, and home-based exercise suggestions outlined in this article will help protect and support you and your baby when babywearing and exercising. I encourage you to try these suggestions and I am confident you will soon agree that babywearing for fitness is a pleasure and joy for you and your baby.

Babywearing for fitness will help you:

- Multi-task and minimise parenthood guilt
- Bond and have quality time with your child
- Boost your endorphins and help rebuild your body
- Add resistance to your workouts as your baby grows
- Will often result in a happy sleepy baby

Selecting the right carrier for exercise

When wearing your baby during exercise you need a carrier that will be comfortable and give correct support. I recommend using a carrier that evenly distributes your baby's weight across your body, so avoid one shouldered carriers and hip positions when exercising.

Carriers that support optimal positioning will have your child upright, give knee-to-knee support, provide neck and back support, be a snug close fit, allow for clear open air ways, and be parent facing.

Woven wraps are a great choice for exercising, but if you are still learning the wrapping technique you may prefer to opt for a good fitting structured carrier that cannot slip or shift during your movements. Stretchy carriers are not ideal for exercise because they can become too bouncy and have a tendency to be less supportive during fitness activities.

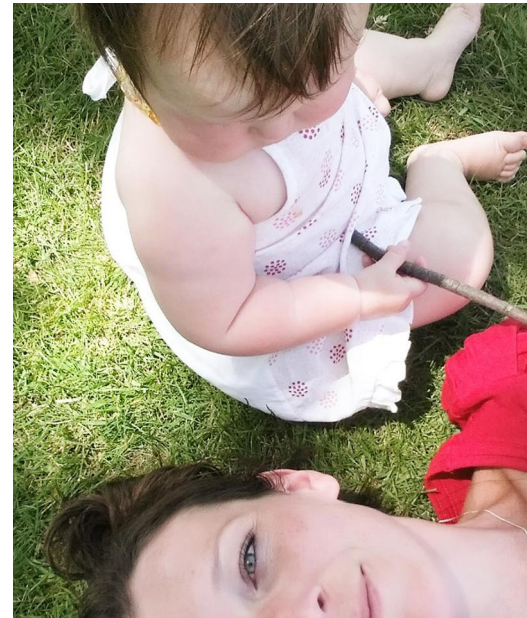
What to avoid

- X High impact exercises or bounding movements, for example, running and skipping.
- X Any exercise that requires you to move off balance or poses a falling risk.
- X Floor exercises, for example, push ups and planks, where slipping could result in falling on your baby.
- X Exercising outside in hot conditions. Opt for a home workout in front of fans or in an air-conditioned room.
- X Using dumbbells, resistance bands or similar exercise equipment while babywearing because a slip could severely injure your baby. Save the use of this equipment for when your baby is safely away from these hazards.
- X Avoid tandem wearing if you have weak pelvic floor muscles or have recently given birth. Practise strengthening these muscles while lying down or seated as the additional weight may counteract the strengthening process or further weaken the muscles.
- X Avoid dehydration. Keep your water bottle handy and sip, sip, sip.

Checkpoints before you begin to exercise

- ☐ Ensure your carrier is safely fastened.
- ☐ Check your carrier provides knee-to-knee support for your child's upper legs so their hips are fully protected during your exercise movements.
- ☐ When wearing your baby on your front always provide extra support with your own hands to your child's neck and lower back during exercises that require forward flexion, for example, squats.
- ☐ Select low impact exercises with smooth rhythmical movements, for example, walking or low impact dancing. You can slowly increase the intensity of your workouts without increasing the impact through either your or your baby's body.
- ☐ Keep your torso mostly vertical during all exercise movements. Avoid exercises in the horizontal or inverted positions.
- ☐ Check your home workout space is safe - no slippery floors, no tripping hazards or obstacles. Watch out for toys, floor cushions, open cupboard doors, stairs, etc.
- ☐ Hold onto something sturdy, such as, a bench, chair or table, for additional support when performing exercises that require more balance, for example, lunges or stretching.
- ☐ Dress lightly to avoid overheating. The area on your chest between you and your baby's face can often become quite sweaty so I recommend wearing a high-neck light cotton top to provide extra absorption and help keep baby comfy. Your baby can even just wear a nappy if conditions are warm, but be sure to apply sunscreen or insect repellent if you are heading outdoors.

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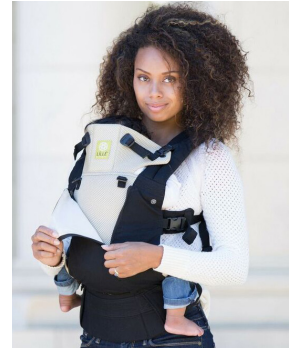
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Babywearing Workouts

For the safety and comfort of you and your baby when babywearing during exercise it is important to modify your regular exercise regime.

During babywearing you automatically turn on your transversus abdominal muscles which are the deep layers of muscle that help rebuild your tummy after pregnancy. Stand tall, do not let the weight of your baby pull you either forward or backwards. Try to breathe normally and avoid clenching your tummy muscles tightly.

Three workouts to try:

1. Your babywearing housework workout

How you exercise as a mother will probably look very different to what you were able to do pre-parenthood. You may find that you only have small pockets of time spread across your day for exercise. When babywearing you can make good use of any 5 or 10 minute opportunity. Incorporate fitness exercises into your regular household activities and kick start your fitness recovery journey. For example, if you are hanging the washing with your little one attached, add extra exercises between hanging each garment, such as, squats, lunges, knee lifts and butt kicks. Repeat until the washing is done.



2. Your sleepy dance workout

When gently rocking your baby to sleep in a carrier you can easily perform a basic dance routine that will help lull baby to sleep. You can do this with your favourite song on the radio or singing a nursery rhyme. You may find that your child loves one movement over another or you can play around with your dance moves and find a great combination that works for you both. Avoid complicated steps, crossing steps or fast turning movements, these are not safe and are not sleep inducing either! Try side step touches, walking back and forward, heel digs and repeater knees. Repeat until sleep dust settles and works its magic, or perhaps continue your routine throughout baby's nap for a longer workout.

Photo: Kassie Harris Photography

3. Dedicated Workout

When all the good omens align and you have the opportunity to get in a dedicated workout with your child, try adding extra intensity. Get the blood pumping with a 20 minute walk around the block, or begin with a lounge room dance party if it is too hot or wet outside. Next, set aside a clear space to perform these 5 exercises in a circuit format. Perform each exercise for 45 seconds, rest and reset for the next exercise. Keep moving through the exercises and repeat for as much time you have available. If necessary, hold something sturdy for additional balance.



Close Stance Squat



Side Leg Raises



Standing Calf Raises



Lunge with Knee Lift



Front Leg Raises

Seek further assistance

If you are unsure about any of the exercises, speak to a postnatal fitness expert about how to complete each exercise safely. Not all trainers will have experience with babywearing, so check qualifications before working with a new instructor. Save the guesswork and participate in a babywearing fitness class that has trained postnatal and babywearing experienced instructors, such as, Kangatraining (www.kangatraining.com.au) or Nurtured Fitness (www.nurturedfitness.com).

Philippa is a pre/postnatal fitness expert, founder of Nurtured Fitness, Babywearing Consultant, Kangatraining instructor and mother of two. All her working career has been in the fitness industry, but when she became a mother she saw and understood for the first time the demands and challenges of maintaining a fitness regime WITH children. Based in Cairns Qld, she thrives on helping women achieve their best. Philippa has developed her range of 100% family-friendly fitness programs, both studio-based and online, so every woman she advises, trains and guides can make fitness a regular and normal activity and an achievable priority within family life. www.nurturedfitness.com