

Children's Connection

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A mother's touch can help baby grow

I use a car seat that converts to a baby carrier. My mother-in-law says I should be holding the baby more. Is she right?

Aren't mother-in-laws always right? Seriously, yours may have a point. Being touched and held is very important to your baby's development. In fact, studies have shown that babies who are not touched and held can fail to develop properly. There's nothing wrong with using the carrier, as long as you are giving your baby plenty of physical contact at other times. (And keep in mind that the baby alone is probably a lot lighter than baby-plus-carrier, and therefore easier on your back!)

A study at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons confirmed what many mothers and pediatricians already knew: Close physical contact with your baby has many lifelong benefits. Holding your baby promotes bonding behaviors on your part and provides your baby with a variety of stimuli that aid his development. Your touch actually helps your baby grow, and the motion of being carried is soothing to babies. Physical parent/infant contact lowers the levels of cortisol, the stress hormone in babies. When you hold her, your baby feels secure and is likely to cry less (which lowers your stress.). While babies may look safe and secure all strapped in their seats or carriers, it is not the same to them as being held. Some studies have even shown babies who are frequently held close develop better verbal skills. Holding him close allows you baby to see your facial expressions and begin to learn to respond to you.

You may be using the carrier sometimes in order to keep your hands free. If so, consider a soft carrier that allows you to 'wear' your baby. These carriers provide many of the benefits of holding your baby - she feels your warmth, is close to your face, and experiences your motions - but leave your hands free.

Or, if you continue to use the seat carrier, just be sure you are giving your baby plenty of holding and touching at other times. If you are not breastfeeding, you can still hold your baby when you give her a bottle. This is important time together - focus on your baby's breathing, rather than trying to do other things while feeding her. Hold her and talk to her whenever possible and get on the floor with her while she is playing. Take advantage of the opportunity for a lot of physical contact now - it won't be long before you will be running after her, begging for a quick hug.

Send questions to the Children's Connection, P.O. Box 26798, Austin, TX 78731