

Outdoor Activities with Your Baby

From biking and hiking to walking and jogging, today's parents are keeping fit and bonding with their babies in the process. With an array of products unheard of a generation ago—like baby carriers, joggers and trailers—even the tiniest among us are enjoying the great outdoors. But while these items can make life easier and more enjoyable for both parent and child, they can be the cause of pain and injury if not used properly. The American Chiropractic Association (ACA) urges you to exercise caution and good judgment while exercising with your baby.

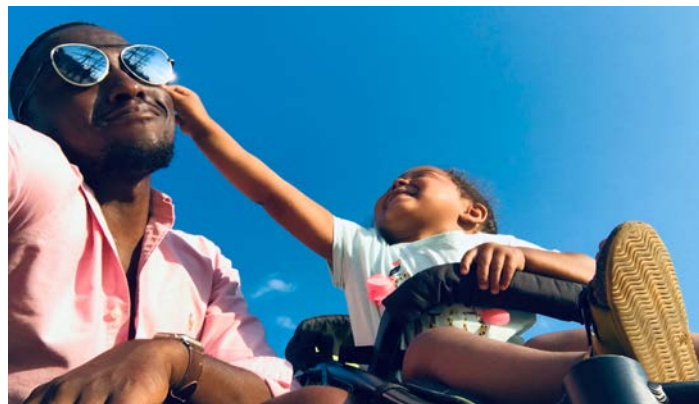
Biking

When biking with a child on board, use a trailer, a rolling ride-along that hitches to the back end of a bike. This is a safer option than a carrier, a “passenger” seat that sits directly on the bike, according to Dr. Scott Bautch of ACA's Council on Occupational Health. Dr. Bautch cautions that carriers can decrease a bike's stability, possibly causing it to topple.

To further ensure the child's safety while biking, keep the following tips in mind:

- Equip the trailer with a harness that can be placed over the child's body. The harness should be complicated enough that the child cannot unhook it or wiggle out of it.
- A screen that covers the front of the trailer will add an extra line of protection against stray pebbles and other flying objects.
- Be sure to select a trailer that has large, bicycle-style tires, which will add stability and ease to your ride.
- Protect your child's head with a sturdy, adjustable helmet that can be sized to fit properly. If the helmet rests too high, it will expose part of the child's head, leaving it susceptible to injury.

- Bike only on smooth surfaces. Only an experienced rider should attempt to bike with a child on board at all. Even then, the rider should practice with a ride-along trailer for two weeks before riding with a real child.



Jogging

If you wish to go for a jog and bring your child along for the ride, the baby jogger is your best option. A baby jogger is a rolling pushcart that a parent can jog behind, using handlebars to maneuver. Here are some rules of thumb to consider:

- Make sure the handlebars of the jogger are large and adjustable, to fit comfortably into your hands for complete control.
- Hand brakes and a locking mechanism are a necessity.
- Look for a jogger with a good shoulder harness to keep the child secure.
- Large, bicycle-style tires offer more control and stability.
- A screen over the front of the jogger adds to its safety by deflecting stray flying objects.
- Jog only on smooth surfaces.

Walking or Hiking

For parents who prefer walking or hiking with their little ones, a backpack-style or front-side baby carrier could work for you. Dr. Bautch cautions, however, that there are risks involved. “The cervical spine of a child less than one year old is not fully developed. It is important at that age that the head does not bob around. The backpack-type carrier is not ideal because the parent cannot watch to make sure the child’s head is stable. A front-side carrier is better for a very young child,” explains Dr. Bautch.

Dr. Bautch urges you to think about the following:

- A backpack-style or front-side carrier decreases a parent’s stability when walking or hiking. Get into shape before attempting to use one of these products.
- Since these carriers will change the feel of walking or hiking quite a bit, they should not be used by beginner walkers or hikers.
- If using a backpack-style or front-side baby carrier, make sure to select one with wide straps. This will help distribute the carrier’s weight evenly. The shoulder straps should fit comfortably over the center of your collarbone.
- The carrier should include a harness to keep the child stable.
- Once you place the child in the carrier, check to make sure there is no bunching of material against the child’s body, particularly on the back, buttocks and spine. Isolated, uneven pressure like this can produce pain.

Baby Slings

The “baby sling” is becoming more popular for its versatility of positions and comfort. But if you wish to use a baby sling, keep in mind that it is intended only for very young infants.

Follow these tips when using a baby sling:

- A baby can become very hot inside the sling, so be mindful of the temperature around you. Also, make certain the baby’s breathing is clear and unobstructed by the sling’s material.
- Never run or jog while carrying a baby in any backpack-style carrier, front-side carrier or baby sling. A baby’s body is not adjusted to the cyclic pattern that is a part of running and jogging. This motion can do damage to the baby’s neck, spine and/or brain.

Take Care of Yourself

Finally, don’t forget about your own health and comfort. When lifting a child to place him or her into a trailer or jogger, exercise caution. Don’t bend from the waist, but begin in a 3-point squat and implement a two-stage lift that consists of (1) pulling the child up to your chest and then (2) lifting straight up with your leg muscles. Stay as close to the car seat or trailer as possible and place the child into it without reaching, stretching or twisting. The further the child is from your body, the more strain you will place on your spine and musculoskeletal system.



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