

Guide to Baby Products

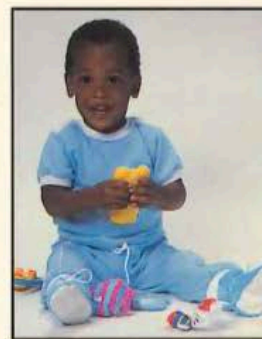
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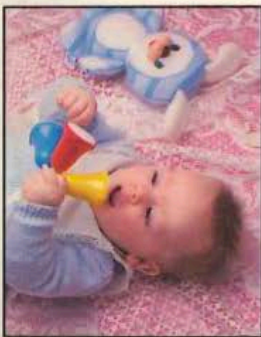
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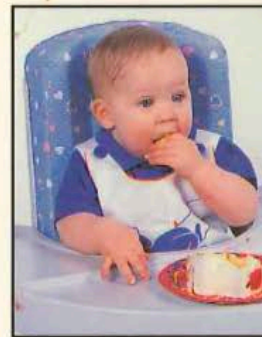
- Evaluates safety, convenience, and durability of hundreds of baby products



- Includes cribs, car restraints, high chairs, strollers, playpens, diapers, and baby foods



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- Plus *Consumer Reports* brand-name Ratings and recommendations

THIRD REVISED EDITION

Sandy Jones with Werner Freitag
and the Editors of
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GUIDE **TO** Baby Products

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Consumer Reports Books

A Division of Consumers Union

Yonkers, New York

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Yonkers, New York 10703
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Jones, Sandy.

Guide to baby products / Sandy Jones with Werner Freitag and the
editors of Consumer Reports Books. — 3rd ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-89043-360-7

1. Infant's supplies. 2. Infants—Care. 3. Consumer education.

I. Freitag, Werner, 1936- . II. Consumer Reports Books.

III. Title.

RJ61.J732 1991

649'.122'0296—dc20

90-20536

CIP

Rev.

Design by Susan Hood
First printing, May 1991
Manufactured in the United States of America

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BACKPACKS AND SOFT CARRIERS

A baby carrier allows you to tote your baby on your body and offers a convenient alternative to a stroller. A carrier won't make your baby any lighter, but a well-designed carrier can help distribute your baby's weight more evenly for less strain than carrying your baby in your arms—and it will leave your arms free. Pouch carriers are for young babies who need head support, while framed carriers are for babies and toddlers who can already sit up independently.

All babies love, and need, to be carried, but it's hard to get much else done while cradling a baby in your arms. From ancient times onward, parents have tied babies onto themselves with animal skins or knotted long strips of fabric to station baby in front or back. There are basically two types of carriers used today: pouch-like fabric models that you wear either in front or on the back and framed carriers designed to be worn only on the back.

Soft and framed carriers offer some advantages over other devices for transporting baby. For example, they offer more mobility than, say, a stroller while boarding a bus, hiking, or getting through a crowd. Having your baby strapped to you offers a feeling of greater security than a baby seat or carrycot, which may tip over when your baby's balance shifts. In addition, babies are usually soothed by the close contact and rhythmical movements of a parent's body—making a carrier very useful for periods of fussiness. Carriers can provide a physical closeness that both parents and babies need.

There are use differences between soft and framed carriers. Soft fabric carriers are for the most part designed to give head support to a very young baby, with the weight of the baby carried almost completely on your shoulders. Framed carriers are designed to be used after a baby can sit up independently, an ability babies usually develop between six and seven months of age. These models offer some structural support by redistributing the baby's weight on your upper body instead of placing all of it on your shoulders.

Some Disadvantages of Carriers

Most manufacturers claim that their packs are constructed to carry children until they weigh about 30-35 pounds, which is around three years of age, but you're sure to find that your child is too heavy for comfort long before that. Your baby's weight in comparison to your own size is an issue that should be considered before purchasing this product. A tall, strong parent will probably manage carrying a baby or toddler quite comfortably, while a short, slender parent may struggle with the discomfort of the carrier's straps cutting into the shoulders and the imbalance caused by baby's increased weight. Also, keep in mind that your child will probably have lost interest in being confined to a carrier long before three years of age—in fact, around the time the child starts to walk.

All carriers tend to be quite awkward and difficult to mount on your body until you get the knack of it. Bending over with your baby in the carrier can be quite difficult, and dangerous for the baby. Some soft carriers are relatively easy to buckle or tie on; but some are difficult to put on without the help of another person. Hefting your baby or toddler around to the back in a frame carrier or pulling the baby around from back to front for dismounting is unwieldy at best. Some framed packs have built-in stands that help make back-mounting easier.

In an informal survey, we found that parents were most likely to complain about aching backs, shoulders, and calves when their baby exceeded approximately one-fourth of their own body weight. Frame carriers usually felt most comfortable when parents were able to use long walking strides, as during hiking. On the other hand, they felt least comfortable when they did a lot of stop-and-go walking, as in shopping malls. Most parents found that their

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