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Wearing your baby in style

Slings replace clunky strollers and backpacks

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EDMONTON

First came celebrities sporting tiny dogs in big handbags as living, breathing, fashion accessories.

Now, in a Hollywood-esque progression of logic, celebrity babies in stylish carriers have become the latest fashion must-have.

While little Shiloh Jolie-Pitt or Kingston Stefan-Rossdale can't be mass-marketed, the baby slings Brad and Gwen are using to cart them around town are now all the rage.

Dozens of companies are producing high-fashion baby slings for today's hip, "baby-wearing" parents. The clunky, plastic baby seats and awkward, metal-framed backpacks of yore have been replaced by softer, body-hugging slings, wraps and carriers.

Julia Roberts, Marcia Cross and Kerl Russell are some of the other celebrity moms who have recently taken up baby wearing.

"Baby wearing is just that. That's your new accessory," says Cheryl Kasianiuk, owner of Bosom Babies in Edmonton.

She says she's seen a huge increase in the number of parents

looking for baby carriers of all kinds recently. "I's grown by leaps and bounds. I used to sell maybe one a month. Now I'm probably selling 10 a day."

Her store carries at least 20 different styles of carrier and she's barely scratching the surface of what's available, she says. Prices range from about \$50 to \$150.

Amanda Whiting, who works at the store and has a wardrobe of 14 different carriers for her own baby and toddler, says it's hard to keep up with all the new ones coming on the market.

"Baby-wearing is really gaining popularity. Those of us who are a little more "crunchy" intended to wear our babies for different reasons, but then when we go out, people are always stopping us and asking about it."

Baby-wearing is convenient, comfortable and healthy for infants, allowing parents to keep close tabs on little ones, says Kasianiuk. That's why it has long appealed to "earthy" moms and dads.

See SLINGS / D2



BRUCE EDWARDS, THE JOURNAL
Devon carries his six-month-old daughter, Hazel, in a pouch sling.



SUPPLIED
Daddy slings come in downright masculine colours and styles.

HOW IT'S DONE
Learn how to get your baby in and out of a baby sling.
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NEWS.COM
Brad Pitt hauls around baby Shiloh.



continued on D2:

'Mom-trepreneurs' put new twists on carriers

More recently, with the example of celebrity parents to follow and the whole "yummy-mummy" image to uphold, fashion-conscious moms (and dads) have taken up the practice, she adds.

The explosion in the number available is largely thanks to "mom-trepreneurs" who have produced their own individual takes on baby carriers to sell both at retail stores and online. Brands like Z'fina and Pippaly were both developed by Canadian moms.

Many manufacturers have modified the traditional pouch-sling design, offering them in beautiful fabrics, trendy colours and a variety of styles. Also popular is the modern take on the traditional Asian mei tai, a cloth carrier that ties over both shoulders and around the body. The modern version looks much like a soft backpack that can be worn in front or back.

"We're making them a fashion piece," says Christian Wolters of Z'fina, whose business partner and sister, Nicola, started making slings about two years ago. "Slings have always been regarded in the past as something a little more earthy, a little more granola. Now we find they're coming into the mainstream."

Z'fina has just developed the "man-sling" for dads, or for moms who prefer a sleeker, sporty-looking sling. An Alaskan company called Cabin Baby makes cold-weather baby slings out of polar fleece. And several companies now make play-carriers for kids who want to wear their dolls or stuffed animals.

Several local baby-wearing parents say they do it for the convenience and for the benefits of keeping their child close to them.

Tamarah Willis found a wrap carrier perfect for the "salsa babies" dance class she took with her son Rylan. She also has a ring sling for carrying him around the house, a pouch sling that folds up and slips easily into her bag and an Ergo carrier, which fits over both shoulders, for longer walks and carrying her baby on her back. "I got a little addicted to them," she admits with a laugh.

Tamie-Ann Langevin has eight or nine slings and carriers at home. She works at Birth Source baby store and teaches baby-wearing classes there too. And she has three little ones, with twins on the way this summer.

"It's easier to care for my children when they're next to me. They're happier, and they cry less," she says. Plus carrying the baby in a sling leaves her arms free to tend to her two older children. When her twins are born, she plans to carry them both — one in front and one on her back.

Devon Toepfer became a baby-wearer when he was at home full time with his baby son, now 2½. He wears his six-month-old daughter regularly too.

"I get a lot of people pointing or nudging their neighbour, like, 'Look, a dad wearing a baby,'" he says.

Carriers are convenient for shopping, especially in stores crowded with strollers. They're also great for the bus, where strollers can be cumbersome.

"I recommend them to everybody," he adds. "It's absolutely the way to go."

z'fina man sling