

The Baby Ecosphere: Babywearing in Cooler Weather

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“My daughter was born in late November. I had a 2-year-old at home already, and getting outside was an essential part of our day. I had always subscribed to the “there’s no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing” thing, so I was prepared to keep getting outdoors every day with both kids. But when I actually went to cozy up with my new baby in a ring sling and head out the door, I realized I didn’t know what to do! Put her in a jacket in the sling? Or put the jacket around us both?”

~ Elise Hall, CBWS Team Member

It’s an understandable question, but a tricky one. As in so many other babywearing scenarios, when you think about dressing for cool temps while wearing your child, it’s important to change your perspective. Instead of thinking of you and baby as two separate beings in need of warmth, like you might with baby in a stroller or car seat, babywearing brings the two of you together into a shared ecosystem.

That shared ecosphere is what keeps your baby safe and comfortable when temperatures drop. And learning how to dress for it can make the difference between a peaceful walk and a chilly, tearful one.

Your Shared Micro-Environment

When your baby is held against your body, with a coat or cardigan around the two of you, your body helps regulate their temperature. Studies have shown that skin-to-skin contact can stabilize a newborn’s heart rate, breathing, and body temperature (Bystrova et al., *Acta Paediatrica*, 2003). Even through clothing, that exchange continues. Your warmth and movement in this shared environment influence your baby’s thermal comfort.

When dressing for cooler weather, it helps to think of this as layering for one combined system, not two separate ones. A light base layer for the baby, a layer for you, the baby carrier, and then a shared outer layer - like your jacket zipped around both of you, a babywearing coat, or a maternity panel - creates a stable, cozy micro-environment.

Once the shared layers come off and baby is separate from you, the system changes. You and your baby will need to be dressed separately again, each in your own appropriate layers.

How It Changes as Your Baby Grows

Newborns are still learning to regulate their temperature, relying heavily on you to help them stay warm. Your shared warmth makes babywearing especially valuable in those early months. In essence, just like baby “borrows” your nervous system to calm down in times of stress or uncertainty, they will also borrow your body’s ability to regulate temperature.

By around six months, your baby’s body begins to mature thermally. They start generating and holding heat more efficiently (Chardon et al., *Pediatric Research*, 2018). You might notice that they sweat more easily or cool off faster than you do, depending on activity. But it’s still nice to keep them in shared layers for a while longer.

At this stage, many parents start to find it difficult to fit both themselves and an older baby under one coat. That’s where babywearing-specific outerwear, like coats, inserts, or carrier covers, can help extend your outdoor adventures. A babywearing consultant can help you try on different options to see what works best before investing in new gear.

By the time your baby is a toddler or early pre-schooler, they are often ready to be mostly on their own, with quick check-ins and snuggles to warm up. That babywearing outwear will continue to be of use for years to come.

The Impact of Practice

Before heading out for a long walk, try your carrier setup indoors. You may be a tad warm while testing, but it’s worth the heat! Move, bend, and reach. Make sure nothing is slipping or digging in. Practice adjusting and removing layers, hats, gloves, and scarves before you add the chill of the outdoors to the equation.

The Ecosphere in Motion

You might notice your baby’s body language change as you move through the day. When tucked inside your coat, your combined warmth keeps both of you comfortable, and you are acutely aware of your mutual temperature. When your baby is carried on the outside of your jacket, you return to being two separate systems, each responding differently to the air around you. You might be moving and working a sweat, while baby is passively enjoying the scenery, becoming steadily colder. When choosing this method, it requires you, as the caregiver, to be more actively involved in monitoring baby’s temperature.

Recognizing that shift makes layering choices simpler. If you start to feel hot but your baby is bundled under your jacket, unzip before you both overheat. If you’re both exposed to the cold, make sure each of you has enough coverage before heading out again and how you’ll keep up with their temperature.

As seasons change, the babywearing relationship changes too. The newborn who once melted into your chest becomes the curious explorer craning to see the world. But no matter how your setup evolves, that invisible ecosystem between you remains, anchoring them in safety as they stretch into independence.

So as you bundle up this fall, think about the *togetherness* that makes it all work. Dress that connection well, and you’ll both find comfort in the shared warmth of your little world.

References

- Bystrova, K., et al. (2003). *Skin-to-skin contact may reduce negative consequences of “the stress of being born”*. **Acta Paediatrica**, 92(3), 320-326.
- Chardon, K., et al. (2018). *Development of thermoregulation in infants: New insights from thermal imaging*. **Pediatric Research**, 83(5), 998-1005.