

Selecting Fabrics for DIY Baby Carriers

Does it pass all 4 tests?

 1) Fiber Content

 2) Weave

 3) Weight

 4) Care Instructions

1) Fiber Content: Natural Fibers

- Cotton, Linen, Flax, Hemp** - **YES**
- Wool** - **Yes, but higher maintenance for washing**
- Silk** - **Yes, if it is REAL silk and not imitation/polyester**
- Rayon, Bamboo, Viscose** - **Okay, but better if less than 40% blend.**
- Spandex, Lycra** - **No, unless you are making a stretchy wrap**
- Polyester, Nylon** - **No, unless you are making a water carrier**
- Metallic Thread** - **Less than 40% is "safe" but may be sweaty and hot**
- "Other fibers" "mixed fibers"** - **Less than 25% is fine**
- "Other fibers" "mixed fibers"** - **Less than 5% okay if it doesn't feel scratchy**
- "Other fibers" "mixed fibers"** - **No!**

2) Weave: Thick Threads, Tightly Woven, No Stretch

- Threads are thick and easily discernible** - **YES**
- Threads are very thin/small, like bedsheets** - **NO**
- Threads are fuzzy and hard to distinguish** - **NO**
- Weave is tight; you can't see through it at all** - **YES**
- Weave is tight; lets light through but you can't read through it** - **YES**
- Weave is moderate; I can't see through it, but I could probably wiggle a pencil tip through the weave** - **YES for wraps & straps**
NO for body panels
- Weave is loose; I can see between the threads** - **NO**
- Fabric has no stretch in any direction** - **YES**
- Fabric has no stretch along length or width, but has a little give along the diagonals** - **YES**
- Fabric has no stretch along its length, but has a little stretch along its width** - **YES for wraps & straps**
NO for body panels
- Fabric has some stretch along both length and width** - **NO except for stretchy wraps**

3) Weight: Thick Like Men's Trousers

- Feels very thick and heavy, like a very thick bag. 7-9oz per sq yd; 220-305gsm** - **YES for body panels**
NO for wraps and straps
- Feels like mens trousers, quality blue jeans or a sturdy tote bag. 5-7oz; 185-220gsm** - **YES for exterior body panels**
NO for interior body panel layer
YES for wraps & straps
- Feels like light women's dress trousers or a men's dress shirt** - **NO**
- Feels like bedsheets or a handkerchief** - **NO**

4) Care Instructions: Machine Washable

- "Machine wash warm/cold/etc"** - **YES**
- "Dry Clean Only"** - **Okay; machine wash anyway. dyes may bleed/fade**
- "Spot Clean"** - **NO**
- "Wipe with a damp cloth"** - **NO**

Specific Fabrics to Look For

Osnaburg

Ask a store associate where the muslin and burlap are. Osnaburg is typically sorted with these fabrics (although some may put it with the canvas.) It looks like natural colored muslin, but the threads are thicker and it is lightly flecked with brown. The bolt tag should clearly say “osnaburg” somewhere on it. Osnaburg is great for wraps and ring slings.

Duck Cloth or Home Decor Fabric

Ask a store associate where the duck cloth or home decor fabrics are. Duck cloth feels like a light canvas, but still rather stiff straight off the bolt. It softens up with use to feel like a floppy favorite pair of jeans. Typically comes in pretty one-sided patterns with a blank wrong side. Duck is great for wraps, straps, slings, body panels, and pretty much any carrier.

Things to look out for: most of the solid-color duck cloth available in fabric stores is heavier weight, suitable for body panels but too heavy to use for wraps, slings or straps.

If it is “home decor” fabric, make sure to check the fiber content and care instructions. Outdoor decor fabrics are often coated to make the waterproof and UV-resistant and will be labeled as “wipe with a damp cloth.”

Cotton Twill & Denim

Ask a store associate where their denim fabric is, or “bottom weight apparel fabric.” (Denim is a type of twill and they should be together, although denim usually gets its own subsection.)

Twill has a diagonal appearance to its weave (like men’s dress trousers.) Some fabric stores even list the denim’s weight in oz/yd on the bolt for reference.

Twill is safe to use for wraps, slings, straps, and body panels.

Things to look out for: added spandex, especially to fashion denim.

Linen

Ask a store associate where the linen is (it typically has its own section within the apparel fabrics.) Linen is safe for wraps, slings and straps. It can be a good fabric for body panels if the weight is thick enough.

Things to look out for: lightweight “tissue linen” that feels more like a dress shirt than dress pants. Check all fiber content: the “linen section” is typically full of “linen-like” fabrics, typically cotton/rayon blends but sometimes even polyester.