

Fabric and Rings FAQ

Fabrics are typically identified by their fiber content and their weave. "100% cotton" can refer to dozens of different weaves; "wovens" are any fabrics that are not knit or spun. So while you can say that cotton wovens make a nice sling, it's necessary to be more specific than that when fabric shopping. For example, quilter's cottons are technically woven cotton, but they are thin, plain-weave cotton, not appropriate for a sling in a single layer. The best fabrics for ring slings are those that have thicker individual threads in a looser weave; unlike bedsheets, a low thread count is best for a sling.

What to look for:

- **Shop in the apparel section for sling fabrics** -- clothing fabrics tend to have more "give" and will, generally speaking, stand up to more wear and tear.
- **Look for bottomweights** -- these are fabrics that one would use to make pants and skirts. Twill and denim weaves will be your best bet for ring slings; however, some twills are too heavy for slings. Look for lightweight denim or twill, and if a numerical value is given, cotton twills/denims should be between 4-7 oz/yard.
- **Linen and linen blends are great for ring slings**, but should be medium-weight (between 5-6 oz/yard) for a single-layer ring sling. Light- or handkerchief-weight linen is not strong enough, and is uncomfortable to wear because of its thin, tight weave.
- **Natural fabrics tend to make nicer carriers than man-made ones**, although there are always exceptions. Cotton, linen, silk, and wool can all be used for slings, although, as above, the weave is more important than the fiber content when it comes to their suitability. Tencel and rayon are both synthetically produced from wood pulp, but tencel is a better choice for carriers because it doesn't lose its strength when wet the way that rayon does.
- **To quickly test suitability for a sling, wrap the fabric around you and see how it feels and drapes.** If it makes a cone shape when draped, it's likely to be too heavy or closely-woven for a sling or wrap. Suitable fabrics will fall in a gentle drape, and will wrap around you easily without causing pressure points.
- Many DIYers now use **woven cotton tablecloths**, although not all tablecloths are suitable. Look for ones with a pattern woven into the fabric (this is called jacquard weave) or yarn-dyed stripes; stay away from thick printed tablecloths or those with more than 20% polyester content. Some curtain panels are also appropriate, but not all.

What to avoid:

- **The most important consideration is that this fabric will be holding your child's weight.** If you're in any doubt about whether a carrier made from the fabric will be safe, don't buy it.
- **Stay out of the quilting and crafts section completely**, except for embellishment fabrics. Quilting fabrics are not intended to be weight bearing, ever. In addition, because they are thin and closely-woven, quilting fabrics will tend to form pressure points even in a double layer. Yes, they are very pretty, but they are not suitable for the weight-bearing portions of a sling. There are plenty of ways to use them to accent your sling. Just don't use them for the main portions. Ever.
- **Muslin is cheap, but it's also very thin, tightly woven, and fragile.** It isn't comfortable to wear, and tears very easily. Osaburg – an unbleached, thicker cotton – is usually in with the muslins, but it is the only "muslin" that is appropriate for slings.
- **Flannel is another special case.** It's soft because the cotton fibers have been treated such that they are already significantly frayed even on the bolt. This makes it much weaker than other fabrics, and while it makes a cuddly lovey or nightgown, it's really not at all suitable for any baby carrier.
- **Fabrics with more than 5% stretch make poor slings.** A small amount of width-wise stretch (that is, from edge to edge) is all right, provided it's less than about 5%. Most stretch twills and sateens can be used for a ring sling, as long as the lycra/Spandex content is 4% or below.
- **Polyester is generally not ideal for slings**, particularly 100% polyester. Because it doesn't breathe well, it will tend to be hotter to wear, and may pose a danger to infants if their faces are "below the rim" or covered by the fabric.
- **Cotton gauze should not be used in ring slings.** It has a very loose weave, and under weight-bearing circumstances, the stitching can tear out very easily because of the weave. It may be safe enough in a double layer, but then you might as well just use a stronger single-layer fabric, since gauze isn't going to be any cooler in two layers.

Rings:

- **The best and safest place to buy rings for a sling is www.slingrings.com.** Their rings are certified and safety-tested, and are the rings most commercial ring sling makers use. They come in a variety of sizes and colors, and you can get either aluminum or nylon rings; the latter is good if you will be going through transportation checkpoints on a regular basis.
- **If you are not ordering from a reputable source, be sure your rings have been safety-tested!** The rings you can buy at craft and sewing stores are almost always inappropriate for a baby carrier. They are intended for craft use, and have not been tested for their weight-bearing capabilities. Usually 1/8" thick and with a weld, these craft rings have been known to snap at the weld, and many rings will also bend under stress. A bent ring can pass through the other ring, causing the fabric to drop away and the child to fall.
- **You may use rings from the hardware store or from tack shops provided they are:**
 - At least 3/8 - 1/4" in thickness
 - If they are welded rather than cast, the weld should be very strong and free of burrs or sharp spots (which will wear down and/or tear your fabric)
 - The correct size for your fabric (see below)
 - However, you should also be aware that hardware store rings have not been tested for their metal content, and some babies like to chew on rings, so your baby may be exposed to hazardous metals if this occurs. They are also quite heavy, and tend to drag the sling's shoulder down when you're wearing it.
- **DO NOT EVER USE D-RINGS ON A RING SLING.** D-rings can slide through each other if they aren't perfectly lined up, and the fabric will simply fall away if that happens, allowing your baby to fall catastrophically.

Choosing the right ring size:

Ring size depends on the fabric weight and width. Thicker, heavier fabrics will need larger rings; thinner fabrics in a wider width can also use a larger ring.

- In general, if your cut and hemmed fabric is between 26-30" and you're using something lighter like linen or a thinner twill or denim, use medium (2.5" diameter) rings.
- If you are using a wider width – over 30" – or a thicker fabric like a tablecloth or 6-7oz twill or denim, you will need large (3" diameter) rings.
- If the rings are too large for your fabric/width, the sling can slip in the rings, which is annoying and can be a safety hazard.
- If they're too small, the sling will be hard to adjust and can still slip because the fabric will pile up and push the rings apart.

Hardware stores may have only 2" diameter steel rings. These are difficult to use with the majority of fabrics, as they are too small most of the time. If you can get 3" rings and they meet the criteria above, they should work with thicker fabrics, but may cause slippage in thinner fabrics. Unless you're in a real hurry, it's best to play it safe and order from www.slingrings.com.