

Baby Walkers

There is a growing concern, both in Australia and overseas, about the dangers associated with the use of baby walkers.

Serious injuries including head injuries can result to children under 12 months of age. Most injuries are associated with the walker falling down stairs or tipping over (e.g. due to a small change in surface level). Injuries also occur when children gaining access to hazards they would otherwise not be able to reach.

Baby walkers make children mobile much earlier than normal, enabling them to cross a room in seconds. Children also become "taller" and can reach higher in a walker.

As a result, they can be scalded by pulling a boiling kettle or hot drink down onto themselves, and can gain access to open fires, heaters, irons and cleaners. There is a heightened risk of burn injuries with children requiring treatment for serious burns.



Most injuries from baby walkers occur when the carer was within close reach of the child.

'Real life' Case

A ten-month-old was placed in a baby walker. The child changed direction and tipped over due to a change in floor level before his mum could reach him. The child received a skull fracture as a result of the incident..



Child Development

Children learn by interacting with their environment. This can be through tasting, feeling, watching, listening or copying those around them.

Just because a child attempts a new skill does not mean he or she understands the risk involved.

Baby walkers are designed to encourage infants to discover their environment at a different height, often before they can identify hidden dangers that can cause them serious injuries. A child in a baby walker cannot see the lower half of its body. This can prevent the child learning how to use its body when out of the baby walker.

Use of a baby walker has been known to delay the development of a child's gross motor skills.

WARNING Avoid injuries. Baby can move fast in a walker. Never leave children unattended. Do not allow near steps, stairs, heaters, electrical cords or hot objects.



Precautions

All children need a safe environment that can stimulate their interests and skills. *Kidsafe NSW* does not recommend the use of baby walkers.

If you decide to use a walker:

- Choose only a newer style built to US Standard Consumer Safety Specifications for infant walkers F977-00. Only products passing this test may be retailed under NSW law. They must be clearly labelled with the WARNING above.
- Check that any locking mechanisms work and are out of baby's reach.
- Make sure metal parts are smooth and are free from sharp edges.
- Do not buy a baby walker if it has gaps that could trap a baby's fingers or toes.
- Block access to dangers like steps and heaters.
- Check for hazards like dangling kettle cords.
- Always provide close supervision – within an arm's reach and in sight of the child.
- If using a second-hand baby walker, look for signs of wear and tear, especially in the seat and make sure the breaking mechanism works.



For further information refer to the ACCC safety alert brochure titled *Baby Walkers* available at acc.gov.au or contact the ACCC Infocentre **1300302502**

Better Alternatives

All parents need time during the day when they can leave their child to play for short periods. Placing a child in a non-movable activity centre or playpen is a safer alternative. This will still provide stimulation to promote a child's development as well as safely house your child while you are busy with activities close by.

Playing on the floor is a much safer position than being propped in a baby walker. Placing a baby onto a rug for floor play promotes large muscle skills like rolling, sitting, pulling, co-ordination, balance, crawling and walking.

All children develop at their own unique rate and will encounter bumps and bruises as part of life's challenges. It is important that parents and carers are aware of the dangers of unsafe product design.



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