

Baby Walker Safety



Most injuries from baby walkers occur when an adult is within close reach of the child.

The baby walker was first designed to support young children, usually up to a year old, who cannot walk to move from one place to another.

Letting a child move around in a baby walker before they are ready to walk by themselves naturally can be dangerous. Some babies have been badly injured in baby walkers. Injuries they have suffered include head injury (skull fracture, concussion) spinal fractures and finger amputations. Some babies have died.

Some walkers have tipped over or fallen down stairs after the wheels caught on cords, rugs or thresholds.

Baby walkers make children mobile much earlier than normal, enabling them to cross a room in seconds, moving too close to hazards they could not otherwise reach. Because children also become "taller" in a walker they can reach up higher.

As a result, they can be scalded by pulling a boiling kettle or hot drink down on themselves or they can gain access to open fires, heaters and irons. This increases their risk of being injured and requiring treatment for serious burns.

Child Development

Some people might think that baby walkers are useful tools for simulating the act of walking in young children. However, use of a walker can lead to gross motor problems and distorted walking patterns. Encouraging them to do things before they are physiologically ready does not make them learn faster.

Children learn by interacting with their environment. This can be through tasting, feeling, watching, listening or copying those around them. Crawling or rolling around the floor is a natural way for a child to learn new skills, to practise moving around and to explore the world around them.

A child in a baby walker cannot see the lower half of their body and is not learning how to use their body when they are in the walker.

A baby walker encourages infants to discover their environment at a different height before they can identify hidden dangers that might injure them.

Using a walker when a child is too young or seem-

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



child safety is no accident

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 a style built to US Standard Consumer Safety Specifications for infant walkers F977-12 as required by the Competition and Consumer Act 2010 - Consumer Protection Notice No. 1 of 2013 - Safety Standard: Baby Walkers
- They must be clearly labelled with the warnings below.



There are additional warnings that must appear on the walker and address the following:

- Use only on flat surfaces free of objects that could cause the walker to tip over.
- To avoid burns, keep child away from hot liquids, ranges, radiators, space heaters, fireplaces etc.
- Warning: Parking brake use does not totally prevent walker movement. Always keep child in view when in the walker, even when using the parking brakes (only for baby walkers equipped with a parking brake).

- 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 brake mechanism works.

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 protect your child while you are busy with activities close by.

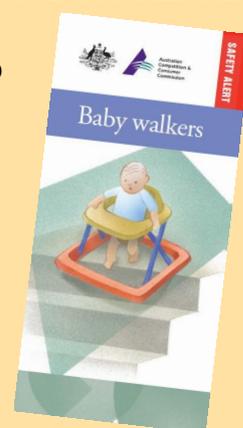
Playing on the floor is much safer than being propped in a baby walker. Placing a baby onto a rug for floor play promotes large muscle skills like rolling, sitting, pulling, coordination, balance, crawling and walking.

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 products that might increase these normal risks.



For further information refer to the ACCC safety alert brochure titled *Baby Walkers* available at productsafety.gov.au

or contact the ACCC Infocentre
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