

BABY WALKERS



There is a growing concern, both in Australia and overseas, about the dangers associated with the use of baby walkers. Serious injuries can result, including head injuries to children less than 12 months of age. Two thirds of injuries are associated with the walker falling down stairs or tipping over (e.g. due to a small change in surface level). A further 20% involve children getting 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 gain access to open fires, heaters, irons and cleaners. There is a heightened risk of burn injuries with over half requiring serious treatment.

Research obtained worldwide shows that most injuries from baby walkers occur when the carer is within inches of the child.

'Real life' Case

Ten-month-old in baby walker. Child changed direction and tipped over change in floor level before mum could reach him; skull fracture.

Child Development

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

Children learn by interacting with their environment. This can be through tasting, feeling, watching, listening to 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.

child safety is no accident

Precautions



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

All children need a safe environment that can stimulate their interests and skills. However, Kidsafe seeks a ban on baby walkers and recommends other options to keep babies safe and amused. If you decide to use a walker:

- Choose only a newer style built to American ASTM standard F977-00. Only products passing this test may be retailed under NSW law. They must be conspicuously labelled with the WARNING above.
- Check that any locking mechanisms work and are out of your 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 baby.
- If second-hand look for signs of wear and tear, especially in the seat and make sure the breaking mechanism works.

Better Alternatives

- Placing a child in a non-movable activity centre or playpen is a safer recommendation and will still provide stimulation to promote a child's development than the use of a baby walker.
- Placing a baby onto a rug promotes large muscle skills like rolling, sitting, pulling, co-ordination, balance, crawling and walking. These skills all promote self-confidence; self help skills and independence.

All children develop at their own unique rate and will encounter bruises and scrapes as part of their life challenges. The danger associated with unsafe product design is one area that we as parents can make an informed choice about how we keep our children safe.



Kidsafe Tasmania
PO Box 19 Claremont 7011
Ph: 0417 381 721
tas@kidsafe.com.au

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