

BABYWALKERS, SAUCERS, JUMP-UPS: Here are some links and excerpts:

<http://www.pediatricservices.com/parents/pc-21.htm>

From a safety standpoint, stationary activity centers like the saucers, which don't roll across the floor on wheels, are preferable to baby walkers. But those who spoke with ADVANCE said both walkers and saucers can cause physical impairment and stress that they would not recommend either device.

Mary Weck, PT, a clinical specialist at Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago, said she has seen more babies walking later because when they hang suspended in a walker or a saucer, they aren't exercising the muscles they need for walking. "We've seen children who are over 18 months old who aren't walking," Weck said. "Usually children walk when they are between 11 and 15 months. The only known condition these babies have in common is spending an inordinate amount of time in a walker or saucer.

"They don't have the power to stay upright on their own because they don't have good back extensors or abdominal muscles." They can have a negative influence on balance. Weck said she is even more concerned by children who are developing a posture that is almost sway-back because of the overuse of walkers or saucers.

They arch their back in an unusual way," she said. "That posture can cause back pain in adults, and there may be potential for long-term disability." When she treats teenagers with back pain, Weck asks whether they used a walker as a baby. Almost invariably, the answer is "yes". The devices also could contribute to difficulty with the feet because children often wind up waling on their toes or pronating their feet.

Kardon, who works with children with neurological physical impairments, said she definitely would not recommend walkers or saucers for them. "Developmentally delayed children or children with special needs use abnormal movement patterns," she said. "With spasticity, they're already pushing their bodies into extension as a compensatory measure, and saucers would promote the abnormal patterns that we're trying to break."

Peter A. Gorski, MD, MPA, executive director of the Massachusetts Caring for Children Foundation in Boston, said that along with physical and safety issues, he is concerned that walkers and saucers give parents and babies less time to interact. "The walkers diminish both crucial social interactive time and create unsafe situations," he said.

The clinicians interviewed agreed that babies need supervised "tummy time" to develop back, neck, abdominal and buttock muscles. They recommend a return to simply time spent playing with Mom and Dad on the floor, instead of using walkers and saucers. When parents need a break and would otherwise use standing equipment, playpens work great, said Weck.

The belief that walkers accelerate a baby's ambulatory progress is also a misconception, Ms. Picone pointed out. Although parents may believe a walker will promote exercise and purposeful movement, it actually can encourage inappropriate balance and postural techniques.

Walking on the toes is common while a baby is in a walker. According to physical therapists and other clinicians who have studied motor behavior in infants, this reinforces undesirable movement patterns and can lead to problems in the manipulation of handheld toys.

Walkers may be particularly inappropriate for children with motor delays or other developmental problems, according to published research (see suggested reading list at end of story). Among infants with muscle tone or coordination problems, walker activities may hinder progress in physical therapy and other treatment.

Moreover, studies have shown that walkers do not actually hasten walking. Although babies can move the walker at an early age by pushing with their feet, this is only because their body is supported and not because they have the motor control and balance necessary for walking. This movement is merely propulsion, not walking.

http://www.aap.org/publiced/BR_Walkers.htm

Make sure there are no walkers at home or wherever your child is being cared for. Child care facilities should not allow the use of baby walkers. If your child is in child care at a center or at someone else's home, make sure there are no walkers.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Association of Children's Hospitals and Related Institutions have called for a ban on the manufacture and sale of baby walkers with wheels. *Keep your child safe. . .throw away your baby walker!*

You may think a walker can help your child learn to walk. But walkers do not help children walk sooner. In fact, walkers can delay normal muscle control and mental development. More importantly, baby walkers are not safe.

<http://parenting.ivillage.com/baby/bsafety/0,,46q2-p,00.html>

Aside from the entertainment this toy gives a child, parents give other reasons for using the walker such as promoting walking and providing exercise. However, up to one-third of parents have said they use the walker because they feel it will keep their infant safe. Unfortunately, none of these are true. The few studies that have been done looking at the

how walkers affect development have shown that they do not affect the time at which a child learns to walk. And in fact, most studies have shown that if there is any effect on walking, it is a delay of a few weeks. Babies who use a walker tend to have an abnormal gait at first.

Safety, however, is an entirely different issue, and is one in which there is a lot known. In 1997, baby walkers sent more than 14,000 babies to the hospital emergency room. Walkers were even involved in 34 deaths from 1973 to 1998.

<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/babies-kids/baby-toddler/play-and-activity/walkers/baby-walkers-1105/overview/>

Despite the name, a walker doesn't help a baby acquire walking skills. Walkers can strengthen lower leg muscles, but not the upper leg and hip muscles your baby will use most. Studies have shown that walkers may even delay a baby's desire to walk unassisted because he can scoot around too easily. More important, some walkers pose a significant risk of injury.

The American Academy of Pediatrics urges parents not to use traditional baby walkers, and even recommended the U.S. government ban wheeled walkers. Since April 2004, the Canadian government has prohibited new and used baby walkers from being advertised, sold, or imported.

<http://www.icpa4kids.org/research/children/babywalkers.htm>

(this is a collection of studies on the effects of babywalkers and other equipment. Samples:)

The mothers of 66 infants were interviewed to obtain information on their children's motor development. The children were divided into three groups according to the length of time they spent in a babywalker. There was no difference between the groups in age at onset of sitting or walking, but children in the high-user group showed a significant delay in onset of prone locomotion compared with the low-user and non-user groups (*This means crawling is delayed*). This suggests that for some infants the excessive use of babywalkers alters the pathway of normal locomotor development. Crouchman M.

The effects of babywalkers on early locomotor development Dev Med Child Neurol 1986 (Dec); 28 (6): 757-761

*****As illustrated by the literature, infant walkers do not have any positive effect on improving motor development. Vulnerability of infants with regards to accidents is increased. In our opinion, the use of infant-walkers should be discouraged. Engelbert RH, van Empelen R, Scheurer ND, Helder PJ, van Nieuwenhuizen O **Influence of infant-walkers on motor development: mimicking spastic diplegia?** Eur J Paediatr Neurol 1999; 3 (6): 273-275

http://www.drgreene.com/21_810.html

Since the days when my first son was an infant, we have learned that walkers are detrimental to normal development. Because the babies can get around too easily, their urge to move across the floor is satisfied, and many of them will not undertake the important task of [crawling](#), creeping, scooting, or hitching. This stage is important for developing strength and coordination.

Many parents think that walkers will help children learn to walk. As it turns out, walkers interfere with learning to walk. In addition to decreasing the desire to walk by providing an easier alternative, walkers strengthen the wrong muscles. The lower legs are strengthened, but the upper legs and hips become relatively weak. The upper legs and hips are most important for walking.

Moreover, children in walkers have more accidents than their counterparts. Walkers often tip over when a child bumps into a small toy or the edge of a rug. They are also more likely to take a dangerous fall down a flight of stairs.

Along with The American Academy of Pediatrics, I strongly urge parents not to use baby walkers.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baby_walker

http://www.hsc.mb.ca/IMPACT/baby_walkers.htm

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