

# HEALTH

## Therapists see no developmental benefits from seats

**Chairs inhibit movement, which is what babies need, experts say**

March 15, 2012 | By Julie Deardorff, Chicago Tribune reporter

Like other gadgets that confine [babies](#), including walkers, [exercise](#) saucers and bouncy seats, the Bumbo Baby Seat is not popular among physical therapists.

Bumbo's website says its product — which props up an infant in a sitting position before he may be physically ready to do it on his own — has developmental benefits and enhances posture.



But the position actually teaches [babies](#) incorrect postural alignment, with a rounded back and the head leaning forward, said Mary Weck, clinical coordinator of physical therapy at Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago.

Rather than using a chair, [parents](#) looking for developmental benefits should play with their baby and encourage movement, said physical therapist Colleen Harper, director of developmental, rehabilitative and [child](#) life services at Chicago's La Rabida Children's Hospital.

"No equipment enhances a child's motor development; equipment is a 'baby sitter' so that a parent can [cook dinner](#), eat dinner or [take a shower](#)," Harper said. "A gross motor skill like sitting is achieved through movement and practice. Children fall out of Bumbo seats because they do not yet have the requisite strength, balance and coordination needed for sitting."

And though many [parents](#) say their children look happy in the Bumbo, Weck says babies can be equally happy in many other positions. Here's how Weck assesses statements found on [bumbo.com](#):

**Bumbo says:** "The seat stabilizes the [child](#) into slight hip flexion, placing the pelvis in a slight anterior pelvic tilt which facilitates lumbar extension."

**Weck says:** "Actually, it does the exact opposite. It puts the baby's pelvis in a posterior tilt, which facilitates lumbar flexion, not extension. That puts the baby's chest behind the pelvis. Then the head has to come too far forward. It's no longer positioned directly above the chest."

**Bumbo says:** "The chair allows a child the pelvic stability needed to get the hands into the midline for play."

**Weck says:** "Children don't need a chair to get their hands in that position. At the age they're using the Bumbo, they are able to do that in a variety of positions anyway."

**Bumbo says:** "Upright positioning facilitates an improved visual field of the environment, improved respirations and breath control and assists a baby who needs to be upright after feeding due to reflux."

**Weck says:** "Studies show tummy time is good at stabilizing the visual field of the environment. Research also shows respirations and reflux are better when the infant is prone rather than upright, as long as the baby is in the proper prone position. One reason the chairs tip over is that babies need to move. This chair holds them from getting the vestibular motion they need to give them control of their [eyes](#) and other sensory issues. All the benefits you get from moving are inhibited in a chair."

[jdeardorff@tribune.com](mailto:jdeardorff@tribune.com)