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Walker Dangers

(Excerpt) Baby Walkers: Unsafe at Any Age

Purpose

- Parents reportedly believe walkers will teach their baby how to walk.
- In reality, the walker is used as a baby sitter.

Useful Life

- Ages 8-12 months
- 20-24 pounds

Hazards

- Responsible for 20,000+ injuries (and/or deaths) annually. Major injuries result from toppling down stairs, tipping into pools, toppling off decks/patios.
- Shoddy/cheap construction ... seat detaches from walker frame on many of them ... small plastic pieces and elastic hold cloth seat to plastic frame
- Tipping ... over carpet bars, toys, rugs, uneven patches in the floor. When it tips, it can leave a child with a broken neck or serious head injury.
- Collapsing ... with a child in it.
- Climbing out of the walker ... since there are no restraints to keep the child in the product.
- Small, lightweight wheels ... gather speed quickly. This speed is forceful enough to knock down "child safe" gates.
- Extends a child's reach ... can pull down cords, etc. Is a major cause of burns to small children ... they pull on the curling iron cord or other hot electrical appliance cords. Other injuries result from the child pulling things down on top of them.
- Places objects in child's view which would not be visible to the crawling infant ... electrical sockets, cords, etc.
- Does not give child proper back support ... leads to poor posture.
- Improper muscle development in the legs.
- Interferes with a child's left/right brain development (motor development) ... child does not spend as much time "struggling" to learn to walk.
- Causes a child's hips to bow out ... causes bowleggedness and pigeon toed walking.

Warning Labels

- Never leave child unattended
- Never use near stairs, steps, thresholds, pools, bathtubs, or on decks
- Never carry or adjust height with child in it
- To avoid burn injuries, always keep child away from ranges, space heaters, fireplaces, etc.
- Always keep child in view while in the walker
- Always check that surfaces are flat and free of objects that may cause tipping over either indoors or outdoors
- To reduce chance of child slipping out of seat, always check that both child's feet touch the floor
- Only use for children who can sit upright unassisted, and weighs no more than 25 lbs.

Cost

- \$39 - \$89 (for exersaucer or treadmill)

Note:

- Walkers were banned in Europe over 10 years ago.
- Canada regulated the walker to death by requiring that the base be heavy enough not to tip over, and that it be wide enough not to go through a standard doorway.
- The exersaucer and treadmill walkers have the same developmental problems as the regular walkers ... they are an industry attempt to circumvent attempts to ban the traditional walker!

Recommendations:

- Do not buy a walker!!
- Apply the \$39 - \$89 to a safe baby product! Buy a low scooter or push toy for you child ... something that forces the child to put his/her foot flat on the floor ... something that helps teach them balance and provides some kind of support when they try to take their first uncertain steps. If you get one as a gift, take it back and exchange it for a safer product, like the push toys, etc.

Baby walkers don't teach your child to walk. Think of it, the last time you saw a baby in a walker, which was was "he" walking? (Most likely backwards ... maybe sideways ... any way but forward!) Even "stationary" walkers (such as Evenflo's Exersaucer and SuperSaucer, or Fisher Price's 2-in-1) can be "walked" down stairs, off decks, into pools and be responsible for serious brain damage, head injuries, and deaths. While the baby product manufacturers have to be aware of the government statistics

concerning the devices, they continue to crank out these search and destroy devices that account for serious injuries, physical and development problems, and even deaths.

The best way to teach your child to walk is the old-fashioned way ... hold out two fingers, let them hold on, and guide them to you. Walking involves using the foot in a heel-toe heel-toe motion, lengthening and strengthening the Achilles tendon, and walking with feet flat on the floor. Walkers dangle a child's feet off the floor, where they learn to "walk" [backwards] on their tip-toes! Parents often place babies in walkers far earlier than they should. A baby has to have control of their head, neck, and back muscles before using a walker.

Walkers, based on the warning labels, are only designed for use from 8 months to 12 months. Yet, parents all too often use them as babysitters and use them far beyond the intended useful life of the product. At the time a baby is placed in a walker, they are on the verge of walking. At this point in their development, they need to be focusing on the effort of putting one hand/knee in front of the other and crawling from point A to point B, pulling up, learning to steady themselves, and discovering how to balance their weight on their own two feet so that they can stand and walk unassisted. Instead, walkers detract them from this important physical and mental effort ... placing them where they can get into danger with electrical outlets, pull items down with cords, etc.

The United States is the last country in the world to allow the sale of walkers or walker alternatives. Europe banned the walker nearly 12 years ago. Canada regulated it to death nearly 6 years ago. Only this year (1996) was California the first to outlaw the use of walkers, walker alternatives, and jolly jumpers in day care, pre-school, and child care centers.

In 1992, the American Academy of Pediatrics joined with the following organizations to ban the sale of baby walkers:

- ◆ American Medical Association
- ◆ Consumer Federation of America
- ◆ The Consumer's Union

As important as the dangers of a walker are, parents need to consider the *developmental* problems associated with walkers and walker alternatives. The baby/child stands with all their body weight on their tiptoes when their bones and muscles are not yet ready to support their body weight. The baby/child straddles a piece of fabric that is half the length of their leg. (Look at your own leg and imagine having to straddle something half the length of your leg.) This pushes their hips out ... it bows out their little legs (which are only cartilage) ... and that forces the feet to come back in pigeon-toed. This leads to improper development of their leg

muscles. The seat does not provide proper back support and leads to poor posture as well. Further, studies have shown that placing a baby in a walker often *slows* their ability to walk. Other studies have attributed learning disabilities later in school to the fact that the baby wasn't involved in the mental and physical activities they should have been at the time they were placed in a walker.

One last word of caution about baby walkers ... this is the only baby product on the market that has *no* (that's right, nada, zip, zero, none) restraint system in it to even *attempt* to keep the child in the product!

Gift Don'ts

- Walkers. The product is an absolute no-no. There are too many injuries every year involving walkers.
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Baby Walkers: Unsafe at Any Age

"Contrary to popular belief, baby walkers neither promote muscle development nor increase a child's walking skills. In fact, there's no real benefit to using one, but there can be real danger. Walkers caused over 18,000 emergency-room treated injuries in 1985, most involving the head or face. While the American Academy of Pediatrics hasn't suggested banning them, they do not recommend their use, says Joseph Greensher, M.D., chairman of the AAP's committee on accident and poison prevention. Manufacturers have made walkers safer and more stable (the collapsible and X-frame modes associated with finger amputation are no longer made but do show up as secondhand purchases or hand-me-downs). Still, walkers can tip over if, for example, they hit a rug or doorstep or if a child leans too far over. But the problem is not all in the product. Lack of supervision is a major factor as parents mistakenly believe children are safer in walkers than on their own. They forget how fast a toddler can move one and they neglect to control the environment — remove rugs, shut doors, keep older and younger children away from the walker. And they forget stairs. Dr. Greensher notes that falls down stairs are the second most common — and potentially most serious — type of accident involving baby walkers. So, be cautious. If you have a walker, make sure it is not a discontinued type. If buying one, buy only new models and only if you can provide a single-surface, closed play area, and constant supervision." (Parents Magazine, October 1986)