

Baby Walkers

Injuries Associated with Infant and Baby Walkers.

In 1999, an estimated 8800 children younger than 15 months were treated in hospital emergency departments in the United States for injuries associated with infant walkers. Thirty-four infant walker-related deaths were reported from 1973 through 1998. The vast majority of injuries occur from falls down stairs, and head injuries are common. Walkers do not help a child learn to walk; indeed, they can delay normal motor and mental development. The use of warning labels, public education, adult supervision during walker use, and stair gates have all been demonstrated to be insufficient strategies to prevent injuries associated with infant walkers. To comply with the revised voluntary standard (ASTM F977-96), walkers manufactured after June 30, 1997, must be wider than a 36-in doorway or must have a braking mechanism designed to stop the walker if 1 or more wheels drop off the riding surface, such as at the top of a stairway. Because data indicate a considerable risk of major and minor injury and even death from the use of infant walkers, and because there is no clear benefit from their use, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a ban on the manufacture and sale of mobile infant walkers. If a parent insists on using a mobile infant walker, it is vital that they choose a walker that meets the performance standards of ASTM F977-96 to prevent falls down stairs. Stationary activity centers should be promoted as a safer alternative to mobile infant walkers.

Injuries associated with infant walkers.American Academy of Pediatrics. Committee on Injury and Poison Prevention. : Pediatrics 2001 Sep;108(3):790-2

Effects of baby walkers on motor and mental development in human infants.

Because baby walkers enable precocious locomotion in very young, otherwise prelocomotor infants, walker experience might be conceptualized in terms of early enrichment. However, walker devices prevent visual access to the moving limbs by design. Therefore, prelocomotor walker experience may be conceptualized in terms of early deprivation, reminiscent of that created in a classic series of animal experiments on the critical role of visual feedback in developing motor systems. This study analyzed motor and mental development in 109 human infants, with and without walker experience, between the ages of 6 and 15 months. Walker-experienced infants sat, crawled, and walked later than no-walker controls, and they scored lower on Bayley scales of mental and motor development. Significant effects of walker type, frequency, and timing of walker exposure were observed. Considering the injury data along with the developmental data, the authors conclude that the risks of walker use outweigh the benefits.

Siegel A, Burton R. Effects of babywalkers on early locomotor development in human infants. Dev Behav Pediatr 1999; 20: 355-361

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