

Your Baby's First Steps



Learning to walk takes practice. Each child will learn to coordinate and balance at different rates. You can expect some wobbling and falling down at first, but before you know it, your child will be running circles around you.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has written this publication to help prepare you for your baby's first steps.

Barefoot is natural

A person's lifelong *gait* (walking pattern) begins with her first steps. Babies learn to walk by gripping the ground with their toes and using their heels for stability. This helps develop the muscles needed for walking and is easier to do without socks or shoes.

Although your baby's feet will develop just as well without footwear, walking barefoot may not always be possible. Shoes should be worn to protect your baby's feet when cruising or walking outside, or on uneven, hot, or cold surfaces. Shoes, socks, and footed pajamas should have wiggle room and traction to prevent falling and allow proper foot development.

Developmental milestones

Although no 2 children develop at the same rate, they should be able to do certain things at certain ages (see below). Talk with your child's doctor if you have questions or are concerned about your child's walking.

Age	Description
At 9 months	May start to crawl, usually backward at first. (Some babies never crawl but instead find other ways of getting around, like wiggling on their tummies and rolling and scooting on their backs.) May pull to stand.
At 11 months	May start to <i>cruise</i> (start to walk while holding onto furniture). May start to walk with support.
From 12 months	May stand on own without support. May walk 2 to 3 steps without support.
13 months	Most babies begin walking at this age.
15 months	May start to walk backward.
18 months	May start to run. May walk across a large room without falling or wobbling from side to side.
2 years	Starts to climb up and down the stairs on own. Can run without falling (occasional falls do not count).
3 years	Can pedal a tricycle.

Shoe shopping

First steps can happen anywhere between 9 and 15 months. As your baby starts to get on his feet, proper-fitting footwear is just as important to his feet as it is for the health of his entire body.

Keep the following tips in mind when shoe shopping:

1. Shoes should be lightweight and flexible in the forefoot to allow babies' feet to flex side to side and up and down for their natural foot movement. They should also provide stability in the mid-foot for control, and cushioning in the heel for stability and balance.
2. Shoes should be made of breathable materials such as leather or quality mesh, as babies' feet sweat twice as much as adults'.
3. Soles should be made of rubber for traction to prevent slipping when babies are learning how to pull up, cruise, walk, and run.

Babies' foot arches do not start to develop until 2 or 3 years of age. Therefore, special arches are not necessary for early walkers; they should appear gradually in children's shoes to support the natural way their feet develop. Handing down shoes from one child to another is not recommended because each child has a unique foot pattern.

In the first few years of life, your baby's feet are rapidly growing. It is likely he will need new shoes every 2 to 3 months. However, once his foot growth slows down, he still has a lot of wear and tear on his shoes. Therefore, it is a good idea to get his feet measured at least every 3 months to ensure proper fit, flexibility, stability, and support for proper growth and development.

If you need help, a trained professional can measure your child's feet and help find the right fit. Your child's feet can be measured for length and width to allow for proper foot growth.

See page 2 for "Safety tips for babies on the move."

Safety tips for babies on the move

Once your baby is able to get around on her own, it's important to make sure your home is safe.

- Cover sharp edges on furniture with padding.
- Make sure all furniture is stable and won't fall over if your child leans against it.
- Safeguard dangerous areas, like fireplaces.

Also, there are no benefits to baby walkers. Many parents think walkers will help their children learn to walk. But they don't. In fact, walkers can actually delay when a child starts to walk. Instead, while you are watching, let your baby cruise along furniture.

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