

## Your Baby's First Steps

Learning to walk takes practice. Each baby 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 baby will be running circles around you. Here is information from the American Academy of Pediatrics to help prepare you for your baby's first steps.

### Barefoot Is Natural

A person's lifelong *gait* (walking pattern) begins with their 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 examples of developmental milestones below). Talk with your child's doctor if you have questions about your child's developmental milestones.

#### By 6 Months

- Rolls from tummy to back
- Pushes up with straight arms when on tummy
- Leans on hands to support themselves when sitting

#### By 9 Months

- Gets to a sitting position by themselves
- Crawls, scoots, or rolls toward an object to get it

#### By 12 Months (1 Year)

- Pulls up to stand
- Walks holding on to furniture

#### By 15 Months

- Takes a few steps on their own

#### By 18 Months

- Walks without holding on to anyone or anything
- Climbs on and off a couch or chair without help

#### By 2 Years

- Walks (not climbs) up a few stairs with or without help
- Runs
- Kicks a ball

#### By 2½ Years

- Jumps off the ground with both feet

#### By 5 Years

- Hops on 1 foot

### Shoe Shopping

Most babies take their first steps on their own by 15 months of age. As your baby starts to get on their feet, proper-fitting footwear is just as important to their feet as it is for the health of their entire body.

Keep the following tips in mind when shoe shopping:

- 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.
- Shoes should be made of breathable materials such as leather or quality mesh, as babies' feet sweat twice as much as adults'.
- Soles should be made of rubber for traction to prevent slipping when babies are learning how to pull up, cruise, walk, and run.

Children's 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 after birth, your child's feet are growing rapidly. It is likely they will need new shoes every 2 to 3 months. However, once their foot growth slows down, they still have a lot of wear and tear on their shoes. Therefore, it is a good idea to get your child's 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.

## Safety Tips for Babies on the Move

When your baby is learning how to walk, do not use a baby walker. Many parents think walkers will help their babies learn to walk, but in fact walkers can actually delay when a baby starts to walk. In 2018, the American Academy of Pediatrics called for a ban on the manufacture and sale of baby walkers with wheels because baby walkers send thousands of babies and children to hospitals every year. Instead, while you are watching, let your baby cruise along furniture.

Once your baby is able to get around on their 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 baby leans against it.
- Safeguard dangerous areas, like fireplaces.

Visit [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.HealthyChildren.org) for more information.

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