

# First Steps

## *How your child learns to walk*

Watching your baby take his or her first steps is an exciting and proud moment.

It is also hard work for your baby. He or she will go through several stages to get to those first steps. Learning to walk actually starts in the crib. When babies kick and bounce in the crib, they are strengthening their leg muscles to get ready for the time when they try to stand and walk.

On average, children start walking around the age of 12 to 15 months. But babies progress at different paces. Most creep, crawl, and learn to pull themselves up before taking their first few wobbly steps. Then there are some babies who go straight from sitting to standing and walking.

Your child may skip a stage or two, backtrack, or he or she may keep crawling a little longer than other children you know. Don't worry. Your child will be walking as soon as he or she is ready.

### **On Back**

**The stages of learning to walk and how you can help.**

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For more Parenting Guides and other information, visit the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development on the Internet at [www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/familyissues/guides](http://www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/familyissues/guides)

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## You & Your Child



# How your child learns to walk

## Learning To Walk

Babies learn to walk in stages. They usually take their first steps around 12 to 15 months, but some walk a little later and some earlier. Some even skip a stage.

### **Creeping**

Most babies first start to get around by creeping. Creeping is when babies pull themselves forward with their arms while letting their stomach and legs drag on the floor.

### **Crawling**

Crawling is often the next stage. Babies get up on all fours and move forward or backward. Encourage your baby to practice. Place a favorite toy just out of reach or sit a few feet away and call to your baby.

### **Stepping**

If you hold your baby up and drag his or her feet forward on the floor, your baby may step. Babies won't be able to step without someone holding them until their legs are stronger and they can balance themselves.

### **Pulling up and standing**

When babies are strong enough, they begin to pull themselves up to a standing position, usually by grabbing onto a table, chair, or even your leg. You can help by holding your baby's hands and arms and raising him or her to a standing position.

### **Cruising**

Babies may take a few steps by holding onto the edge of a table or chair. They are practicing balance and strengthening their muscles. Babies can walk because of balance. If you support your baby under the arms, he or she will take steps.

### **Walking**

Eventually, babies become braver, more confident. When standing, they will let go of what is supporting them and try to take a few steps on their own.

Soon, your baby will try to walk to you when you call. Don't be surprised if your baby takes only a few steps at first, then sits or falls down.

## How You Can Help

- Don't hurry. Your child will eventually walk. He or she will set the pace.
- Provide opportunities to practice. For example, when your child can only walk a few steps, arrange the furniture so those steps will take him or her across the room by going from chair to chair.
- Cheer your child on. Learn to appreciate the small steps your child takes toward walking. Don't criticize.
- When your baby falls, smile and encourage another try. If you wince, make a face, and get concerned, so will your baby.
- Don't worry about setbacks. Sometimes children's progress seems to stop and they go back to what they had learned before. This is common.

### **Take safety precautions**

When your child begins to move around the house, you'll need to take steps to make it safe.

- Block stairs and other dangerous areas with a gate. Gates should be at least 32 inches high. The slats on a gate should be close enough so that your child's head cannot fit between two slats.
- Secure bookshelves and entertainment centers to the wall so they won't fall over when your child pulls on them.
- Pad sharp edges on tables.
- Cover unused electrical outlets with outlet plate covers. Hide electrical cords or tape them to the floor. Do not place them under a rug.
- Put breakables, such as dinner plates and glass, someplace where your child cannot reach them.
- Be careful about drapery cords. Cut them at the bottom of the loop. A loop at the end of a cord could strangle a child.

