Creeping and Crawling: How to Keep Your Baby Safe and Sound

Your baby's growing ability to move where he wants makes life more complicated for everyone. Whether he scoots on his bottom, creep on his belly, crawls on hands and knees, or uses some combination of these motions, it's likely that during the coming months he'll end up in places you'd rather he couldn't reach.

Although his newfound mobility can be exasperating for you, it's an important part of his development. Be sure he gets plenty of floor time. Too much time spent in a crib, playpen, infant seat or swing won't give him the time he needs to move around.

However, if he's getting the opportunity but isn't trying to creep or crawl by this age, don't worry. Crawling is not considered a developmental stage. He may be putting his energy into developing other skills, such as vocalizing or playing.

A moving baby needs constant attention. As he begins his long development toward independence, your baby relies on you to keep him safe. That means childproofing your home.

Milestones

Between 8 and 9 months, you:

- can move from a sitting to a lying position all by yourself.
- can lean forward and then sit up again, without falling over.
- may be beginning to say "dada" and "mama" and to associate these sounds with us.
- can bear some weight on your legs when I hold you upright. You may be able to stand holding onto someone or something.
- look for a dropped object and work to get a toy out of reach.
- may be able to pick up a tiny object with any part of your thumb and finger.
- understand the word "no," but can't be expected to obey it.

Falls: Most common when a baby tries to climb out of his crib. Lower crib mattress to lowest level. Once your baby is 35 inches tall, or when the side rail is less than three-quarters of his height, it's safest to move him to a mattress on the floor. Use a sturdy gate at both the top and bottom of any stairs. Remove any rickety furniture.

Move the crib and other furniture away from windows, and be sure they can't be opened wide enough for baby to fall through.

Drowning: Block access to the bathroom with a gate or keep the door closed. Keep the toilet lid down. Never leave your baby alone for even a second in the bathtub, in the bathroom, near a bucket of water, or near any other source of water such as a wading pool, fish pool, puddle or fountain. Babies can drown in only one inch of water.

Choking: Keep cords from window blinds and drapes safely out of reach. Don't give your baby a balloon, whether inflated or not. Make sure toys do not have pull cords or ribbons longer than 6-inches. Keep

Excerpted from *What to Expect the First Year* (Workman, 1989) and *You and Your Child* (Ross Laboratories, 1987)
When choosing finger foods for your baby, always keep safety in mind. Eating is best limited to his high chair, where he's safely strapped in place and can be closely watched. Eating when he's crawling or cruising around, or when he's laughing, crying or very excited, can lead to choking.

Because babies tend to put several pieces of food in their mouths at once, don't offer more than a few pieces. As he eats what you've given him, you can give him more. For families with strong histories of food allergies, talk with your baby’s health care provider for guidance in introducing new solids to your baby. For babies without a concern of food allergies, here are some good choices.

- small pieces of mashed vegetables cooked until soft such as carrots, squash, potatoes and string beans.
- small pieces of soft, ripe fruits such as bananas, peaches, pears, apricots, melon and grated apple. Peel the skin and remove all seeds.
- soft cheese, cut into small cubes or shredded, and cottage cheese.
- unsalted crackers, graham crackers, soft cookies (such as arrowroot), whole wheat bagel, bread, toast, French toast or pancakes.
- unsweetened cereal such as Cheerios.
- soft-cooked noodles or macaroni cut into small pieces.

Never give a baby spoonfuls of peanut butter, nuts, hard candy or cough drops, popcorn, uncooked raisins, raw hard vegetables, grapes or hot dogs and chunks of meat or poultry. Children don't learn how to grind foods like nuts until they're 4.

In general try to avoid foods that have salt or sugar added. Your baby's sensitive taste buds don't need this stimulation.

Try to accept that mealtimes with a baby are messy. Put a plastic cover on the floor under the high chair or seat and, if it's not too chilly, let him eat without a shirt to simplify clean-up.

First finger foods should be those your baby can gum until they're safe to swallow or those that will dissolve in the mouth without chewing. Food needs to be cut into small pieces.

First Finger Foods

With a crawling baby in the house, it's easy to find yourself saying "No!" almost constantly. While your baby is beginning to understand what "No" means, he's too young to remember for more than a few minutes that your treasured crystal vase is a "no-no."

The better childproofed your home, the fewer times you'll have to say, "No!" and the safer your possessions. This doesn't mean that it's pointless to set limits for your baby. It's not too early to begin teaching him words like "ouch" or "hot." But that doesn't mean you can rely on him not to reach for your cup of steaming coffee—even though he may point to it and say "hot." That level of understanding is several months away.

For each "No," it's a good idea to offer a substitute that is okay. If he starts to throw toys, offer him a ball instead. "You can throw this ball, not blocks."

For the next few years, diversion will prove to be one of your best strategies for good behavior. Babies quickly pick up on their ability to create a strong response from parents, whether it's anger, laughter or frustration. Try to keep your cool when setting limits, even though you may feel more like yelling or bursting into laughter. If you rotate playthings, this is the time to pull out a "new" toy to distract your baby.

No one's perfect, of course, and if you do lose your temper, be sure to apologize by saying something soothing such as, 'I'm sorry I yelled. I was angry.' Then follow your apology with a reassuring hug.

It helps to remember that your baby isn't being bad. It's his job to explore his surroundings. Using distraction is a good way to teach what's allowed and what isn't.

Babies, of course, have more than their share of accidents. If yours spills a glass of milk as he reaches for his cracker, let him know that accidents happen: "Oops! The milk spilled."

Whatever he does, be sure he knows it's his behavior that's at fault: "Biting hurts," not, "You're a bad boy." Telling a child that he's bad can lead to more negative behavior.

You're not spoiling your child if he sometimes gets what he wants. Offering him choices—"Do you want a cracker or a bagel?"—gives him a chance to develop a sense of independence.
Play Time

What does an 8-month-old enjoy? Noise, repetition and discovery. Many things that we adults take for granted are new and exciting for him. Here are some suggestions for activities he'll enjoy.

♥ Create a bin or low cabinet in the kitchen that can be all his. It might contain wooden spoons, plastic cups, spice cans that rattle, and pots and pans to bang.

♥ Play peek-a-boo with him or ask older siblings to play. Take turns "looking" for him behind a towel or pillow, and letting him "find" you. Try hiding behind a door or corner with one arm or leg showing. Let your baby "find" you.

♥ Read sturdy picture books, repeating the names of animals and objects for him.

♥ Let him examine many different things—from blades of grass to soap bubbles.

♥ Hide a toy part way under a box or towel and let him find and remove it.

♥ Take your baby's hands in yours, touch one to each of your eyes, then both to your nose, then to your mouth.

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any item smaller than your baby's fist safely out of reach—small toys, marbles, coins, and button-sized batteries are especially dangerous. Follow the guidelines on safe finger foods in this issue of Welcome Words. Secure or remove loose knobs on furniture or doorstops.

Burns: Block access to the stove or any other source of heat such as radiators, heaters, fireplaces, irons, curling irons, ashtrays, lighters and candles. Use covers on electrical outlets, tape down electrical cords and block access with heavy furniture. Don't smoke, eat, drink or carry anything hot while holding your baby. Keep hot dishes and containers away from the edge of tables and counters and don't use tablecloths that he could pull.

Poisons: Keep all cleaning supplies, cosmetics, paints, medicines (including over the counter), vitamins, and other chemicals out of reach and in locked cabinets. Keep the trash can out of reach. Remove houseplants or be sure that even fallen leaves are out of baby's reach.

Remember that no matter how carefully you childproof your home, there's no substitute for a watchful adult. Every parent needs a break from this exhausting responsibility. It's fine to put your baby safely in his playpen for a brief break when he's had enough exploration, or strap him securely in his stroller and go for a long walk. You'll both enjoy a change of scene.

Coming to Terms With ‘Mrs. Dad’

I grew up playing with dolls and dreaming of being a mommy with a station wagon full of little girls. At 5:30 p.m., I'd have dinner on the table for my adoring husband when he returned from his long day at work.

Instead, I go to work and my husband—a casualty of corporate downsizing when our son was 5a weeks old—stays at home. Dinner is on the stove when I arrive. Grant could not be a happier baby, and my husband smiles much more than when he left home for work every day. Surrounded by such glee, why am I not thrilled? Could it be that I feel left out, or it is that I'm not living up to all my "mommy expectations"?

Maybe it's that George doesn't have to use an alarm clock anymore, or worry if what he needs to wear to work is ironed. Or maybe it's times like the one when I wanted to take Grant's picture and he wouldn't cooperate. In walked Dad and Grant just beamed. And why not? George is the daily caregiver, changing diapers and prepping formula.

Does that make me "Mrs. Dad"? Somehow I don't find that title amusing. When asked at work how daycare is going, I sometimes hesitate to say that my husband is managing the house and caring for our son. Is it those childhood stereotypes I thought I'd outgrown? I thought I was more sophisticated than that.

I know that this is a real opportunity for all of us. George and Grant are forging a wonderful bond and I will be loved by two happy well-adjusted men who know women and men are capable of anything. Now, if I can just remember all these insights at 5 a.m., when the alarm goes off, and I wonder if my clothes are ironed.

-Trudy Lavin-Wensell

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Welcome Words
The Newsletter of the Welcome Baby Program

Suggested Reading

How to Get Your Kids to Eat...But Not Too Much
by Ellyn Satter

The First Three Years of Life
by Burton L. White

The Essential Partnership: How Parents and Children Can Meet the Emotional Challenges of Infancy and Childhood
by Stanley Greenspan and Nancy Thorndike Greenspan

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naming each feature and ending with a kiss. "Eyes, nose, mouth, smooch." This is a good way to teach these parts of the body.

♥ Let him experiment with crawling around or over cushions of different sizes and shapes (with your supervision, of course).

♥ Rotate toys every week or so (except for his most treasured playthings). After he hasn't seen them for a couple of weeks, your baby's old toys will seem brand new.

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Most babies aren’t able to pick up objects between the thumb and forefinger (pincer grip) until between 9-12 months, but now is a good time to begin practicing. However, once the pincer grip is mastered, your baby will be able to pick up any small item (coins, pins, etc.) and potentially choke on it. Be sure you've childproofed your home and that you've learned first aid for choking through an American Red Cross infant CPR/first aid course. Call 489-6541 or visit www.durhamredcross.org.

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Welcome Baby Program
Durham County Cooperative Extension
721 Foster Street
Durham NC 27701
(919) 560-7150
www.WelcomeBaby.org

More Questions?

Are you wondering if his motor development is on schedule since he isn’t crawling yet? Or if he is eating the right solids for his nutritional needs?

Welcome Baby can help.
Our free program provides information and support to parents of young children. Services include a lending library of books and videos, a support group, parenting workshops, car seat safety program, free clothing closet, and volunteers and staff available to discuss parenting concerns.

Call us at 560-7150.