

## A child's journey to his first steps

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Watching your baby making his or her first steps is a celebrated and proud moment. From their first kicks in the crib to walking, your child has to work hard but you can help them make their way towards their independence.

As a paediatric physiotherapist, I often encounter parents who are concerned about the motor development of their child. Why does my baby cry when he is on his tummy? She is a bottom-shuffler and will he ever crawl? Why does he sit stiffly and doesn't move a lot? Is he a late walker?

Motor development follows a continuous sequential pattern. Your baby will need to acquire one stage after another before he takes his first steps. You can try them out yourselves to feel the strength, coordination and balance your baby needs before walking: Flat on your back, roll onto your side then onto your tummy and try creeping around. Then move onto all fours, you may sit for a while and then move back to all fours, kneel sitting up, hold on to a support, half kneel and stand up. You can then cruise around, stretch one arm, bend your knees to pick up a toy, come up again. When you feel ready and steady, let go and make your first steps!

To move from one stage to the next, your little one needs to practice each step, repeating with persistence and through a process of trial and error before achieving the goal of walking. His movement skills and progression from one stage to the next one depend on all the experiences he will repeat many, many times.



All those learning skills happen at different rates depending on the the child and his environment. They overlap one another. Whilst getting very good at one stage, your baby experiments with the following one. Children progress at different rhythms.

### How can you help your child on their way to walking?

- The first 3 months, supervised daily Tummy Time is fundamental to gain control of the head and strengthen the upper body before he can support himself sitting down.
- Give your baby plenty of time to go through each stage one after the other.
- Provide opportunity to practice in varied positions with lots of time on the floor to move, reach, touch and explore.
- Focus on movement rather than held positions. Babies like MOVING: minimise time in bouncers, car seats and Bumbo seats. **Physiotherapists do not recommend the use of walkers.**
- Encourage when he fails and tries again. Use everyday activities to help him. Take that extra precious time with your baby. They learn by observing and imitating you.



If you have any concerns regarding your child's motor development, do not hesitate to talk to your doctor or a paediatric physiotherapist for an evaluation or just for advice.

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## Health and Safety during swimming classes

When dealing with swimming lessons for all ages and abilities it is extremely important to put safety first. We asked Dan Pastor of SwimWay to explain why they make Health and Safety a major priority in the way they run their lessons.

"Although it would be more cost effective for our company to run lessons with larger groups of children, health and safety and quality of lessons is so important to us, that we keep all our lessons as private or semi-private. This allows our instructors to focus fully on each child's safety and needs within the lessons.

Legal requirements dictate that instructors undergo CPR and other emergency training only once every two years. We recognised that this is incredibly insufficient. Thus we run a first aid course at the beginning of every term. That comes to three times a year instead of once every two years.

We have also brought into the SwimWay team a specialised health and safety consultant – David Perry (see [swimway.co.uk](http://swimway.co.uk) for his full profile). With over 15 years' experience in the industry, working with leisure centres and private swimming schools, as well as the STA (one of the UK governing swimming teaching bodies), David Perry brings a professional eye and mind to the health and safety concerns of our swim school.

David routinely runs the termly first aid courses. He makes regular monthly pool visits to ensure our sites are up to spec. He also meets with the site owners and SwimWay management to discuss and resolve potential issues. He is our eyes and ears for the health and safety awareness of the company, keeping us on the forefront of your children's, and your own safety during our lessons.

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