

[Crawling: Is it Important?](#)

As the saying goes, "You have to crawl before you can walk." While there have been cases of babies bypassing crawling to go straight to walking, most babies will become proficient crawlers some time during the second half of their first year.

Not all babies learn to crawl in the traditional fashion however. Some do a belly crawl (sliding along on their tummy) - and go straight from there to walking. Some babies prefer to remain upright and scoot around on their bottom rather than crawl. Others crawl backwards!

Whether or not babies need to learn to crawl forwards is a matter for some debate. According to some pediatricians and pediatric textbooks, crawling is not an important developmental milestone. The method of locomotion is irrelevant, say the experts, so long as babies learn to get from A to B.

However, according to childhood educator Glenn Doman, a pioneer in the field of right-brain training, crawling forwards is an essential skill to master. Doman claims that crawling stimulates the brain to develop convergence of vision - and that as a result, people who skip this phase as babies may find it extremely difficult to learn to read and write as children. In addition, children who missed out on crawling may suffer from speech problems, he says - because the same part of the brain controls both functions.

In cases where a child skipped crawling or did very little crawling as a baby, Doman recommends practicing crawling every day for six months. To get a child who knows how to walk to do this, it will probably be necessary for her parents to get down on the floor and crawl around with her! (This should not be tried until two-and-a-half to three years of age, as before that, children are too enamored with the newfound freedom of walking.) It may sound a little outlandish, but Glenn Doman mothers have attested to their success in improving a child's speech simply by getting her to practice crawling.

The prone position

If the importance of crawling is a matter for some debate, the placing of babies in the prone position (on their tummies) is an even more controversial issue, because it could be a matter of life and death. The question is: does sleeping in the prone position put babies at greater risk for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), or crib death?

According to some experts, yes - and the current wisdom is to always put babies to sleep on their backs. According to Glenn Doman, it is more natural for babies to sleep on their tummies. He adds that nighttime is an important time to make use of the prone position, as tiny babies actually belly crawl in their sleep.

Which advice you choose to follow at bedtime is up to you. What seems clear though is that maximizing tummy time during the day can do no harm - and can indeed encourage the development of your baby's motor skills. Once in the prone position, your baby will instinctively lift his head (helping to develop his neck muscles), push up with his arms (helping to develop his arm and chest muscles) and push off the floor with his legs (helping to develop his leg and hip muscles).

According to Doman, babies get bored when we place them on their backs and leave them to look at mobiles. What they really want is to explore the world - and putting them on their tummies gives them the opportunity to do this. Once in the prone position, a baby can see nearby objects and feels motivated to get over to them. Doman recommends that babies spend a minimum of four waking hours in the prone position - thought that time can be divided into short segments. This is in addition to the time the baby will spend on her tummy while asleep.

In reality, many babies hate tummy time - especially if they have not been in the prone position much since birth. Many parents report that their baby fusses or cries to be rescued - even when the baby was the one to turn onto his tummy in the first place! How you deal with this will come down to the degree of importance you place in developing mobility early, as well as your comfort level with your baby crying. Doman recommends that you get down on the floor with your baby. In this position, you can encourage and reassure him, even while refusing to pick him up.

Pediatricians generally recommend regular tummy time - although the importance they place on it varies considerably. Some doctors point out that babies are not ready to crawl until they have developed the muscles needed to sit well unsupported. Babies don't usually cry out of a failure to do something, they say, but rather because the activity being asked of them is developmentally beyond their reach.

However, the fact that babies can belly crawl from birth is well documented - and it is this at-first-instinctive crawl that usually leads to the most advanced type: crawling on all fours in a cross pattern (where the right arm moves with the left leg and vice versa). If you decide to follow Glenn Doman's advice, and can see out the difficult initial period, you should find that your baby stops fussing in the prone position. Indeed, once she has discovered the joys of mobility, she will probably prefer to be on her tummy than in any other position.

Learning to crawl

Crawling - assuming your baby does it - normally starts between 6 and 10 months of age. Besides giving your baby regular tummy time, preferably on the floor, there are several things you can do to make it easier for him to get moving. Do not overdress your baby, as this would hamper the movement of his limbs and joints. When possible, leave your baby's feet, knees and elbows bare, as this will give him better grip.

To help your baby get moving in the prone position, let her push off against your hands with her feet. This should help her begin to belly crawl. If your baby looks about ready to get onto all fours, you can help by bending her legs gently and lifting up her bottom. Don't force your baby into this position though, and don't try to rush her into crawling on all fours.

You can also encourage your baby's mobility by dangling his favorite toys just out of reach, or once he has started to belly crawl, calling for him to come to you on the other side of the room. Avoid aids like walkers, which take a lot of the effort out of getting around - to babies' detriment.

You might also consider making or buying an infant crawling track (details of which can be found in Glenn Doman's *How To Teach Your Baby To Be Physically Superb*). The track has a surface with good traction and can be put on an incline (by placing one end on a step). Using a downward slope makes crawling easier, while the upward slope can be used later to make crawling more challenging.

Learning to walk

Babies normally start walking between 10 and 18 months. Some parents get anxious when their baby shows no signs of walking at a year of age. If that describes you, then remember what Glenn Doman says about the importance of crawling in developing speech as well as reading and writing skills. If he's right, then learning to walk late might actually be a good thing!

As your baby gets ready to start walking, she will grab the furniture and pull herself up to a standing position. She will then experiment with "cruising" - moving around on her feet with the furniture for support, and occasionally standing for a few seconds unaided. Let her do so barefoot, as this will make it easier for her to develop her balance and coordination.

There's plenty you can do to help strengthen your baby's leg muscles besides. Before he begins to stand (or even crawl), let him grip your fingers (holding his wrists as a precaution) and pull him up to standing, so that he's supporting his own weight. Later, you can help him "walk" by supporting him under the arms. When he starts to cruise, encourage him to let go of the furniture by holding out your fingers and letting him grip you with both hands. Before you know it, he'll be holding on to you with one hand only.

Babies start getting up on their feet before they know how to get back down, so don't be surprised if your little one cries for help while standing. Rather than picking her up, you can help her learn to sit down by gently bending her knees and supporting her weight until she reaches the floor.

Enjoying the journey

Whether your child is learning to crawl or to walk, give him as much opportunity to move around as possible, minimizing the use of playpens and other restrictive devices. When he first starts walking, help by directing him to flat, smooth surfaces. As his coordination improves, let him walk on an incline and on uneven surfaces, both of which will help to develop his balance.

Most of all, enjoy your little one's first unsteady steps into the world. Babies grow up fast, and it won't be long before looking after your child involves a lot more running than walking!

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