

Choosing Safe Baby Products

Even though babies are small and seem uncomplicated, there's nothing small or simple about their accessories. Selecting products for your baby can be confusing, especially with all the new gadgets and features available (not to mention the many product recalls).

Cribs

- Side rails should be fixed and not adjustable. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) banned the sale of adjustable side rails for safety reasons.
- The distance between slats must be no more than 2-3/8 inches to protect infants from falling out and toddlers from trapping their heads.
- If the crib has corner posts, they must be either flush with the top of the headboard and footboard or very tall — more than 16 inches. Anything in between is a potential strangulation hazard.
- Get the firmest mattress you can find and make sure it fits snugly in the crib.

Infant Carriers

- Carriers should have straps that prevent your baby from falling or crawling out. Look for firm, padded head support.
- Check for ease of use. Some of the soft ones are difficult to put on because of numerous straps.
- Try the pack on for comfort, both with the baby in it and without.
- Ideally, the fabric should be durable with strong stitching or large heavy fasteners to prevent slippage.

Strollers

- Choose a stroller that was made for your child's age, height and weight. Newborns need to be able to lie almost flat in strollers.
- Choose one with reliable restraining belts. The safest design is a 5-point harness: shoulder straps, a strap between the legs and waist belts that connect together.
- The wheel base should be wide and the seat should be low in the frame. The stroller should resist tipping backward when you press lightly down on the handles.
- The leg openings should be small enough to prevent an infant from slipping through.
- You should be able to steer the stroller in a straight line when pushing with one hand.
- The handlebars should be at your waist level or slightly lower.

Playpens

- Check the label for "JPMA" (Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association), which means the playpen meets the safety standards of the Consumer Products Safety Commission.
- The sides should be at least 20 inches high, measured from the floor of the playpen.
- If the playpen has mesh sides, the holes in the mesh should be no larger than ¼ inch.
- If the playpen is wooden, the slat spaces should be no more than 2-3/8 inches in width.
- Look for padding on the tops of the rails to protect your baby from bumps.
- Look for a 1-inch firm mattress or pad at the bottom of the playpen.
- The locks that allow you to lower a side should be out of your baby's reach.
- Make sure the playpen has well-protected hinges and supports.
- Look for a playpen with top rails that automatically lock when lifted into the normal position.
- Stop using the playpen when your child can easily climb out or when he reaches a height of 34 inches or weighs 30 pounds.

Baby Gates

- Measure the doorway or top of the stairs before you shop so you buy a gate that is wide enough to block the space.
- Look for a hardware-mounted gate that attaches to the door frame without any openings to trap fingers or necks. Pressure-mounted and freestanding gates can fall over if the child pushes hard enough, so these gates are not safe to put at the top of the stairs.
- Choose a gate with a straight top edge with either rigid bars or a tight mesh screen. Old accordion-type gates (sold before 1985) are not safe; they have diamond-shaped openings with wide V's at the top. These can trap a baby's head and cause him to choke.
- There should be no more than 1 to 2 inches between the floor and the gate bottom to keep a child from slipping underneath.
- Rigid vertical slats or rods should be no more than 2-3/8 inches apart, so that the child's head cannot be trapped between the slats.
- Check for sharp edges and pieces that could cut or hurt a toddler's hands. If the gate is made from wood, check for splinters.

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- Do not buy gates with openings that a child could use for climbing.
- The gate should be no less than three quarters of the child's height.

Changing Tables

- Wooden changing tables with rails are usually the least likely to sway or tip over when a baby pulls on them from the floor.
- Fold-up models should be checked for sturdiness when the table is open by giving it a good shake.
- A wire changing table should have a wide base so that a baby can't pull it over on top of himself from the floor.
- The table should have shelves or compartments for storing everything you'll need. This prevents you from taking your eyes off your baby. You should keep supplies within your reach, but out of the baby's reach, because many diaper supplies are dangerous for babies.
- A flat changing surface should be surrounded on all four sides by a guardrail, which should be at least 2 inches in height. The surface should be lower in the middle than on the sides, which helps keep the baby from rolling from side to side.

Walkers

Don't use a walker for an infant. Use of baby walkers has fallen dramatically from their peak in the 1990s, but about 3,000 walker-related injuries a year are still treated in U.S. hospital emergency rooms. Instead of a walker, consider a stationary activity saucer.