keep your baby safe

advice for new parents
This booklet is for new parents and covers babies from newborn to crawling. It is divided into two sections for ease of reference.

Section one tells you about the equipment you may need to buy before you bring your baby home or when he or she is a few months old.

Section two gives useful tips on how to set up your baby's room and gives advice on changing, bathing, feeding and playing with your baby safely.

You should always try to anticipate the next stages in your baby's development. Very young babies can wriggle, kick and even roll over and it is important that you are aware what risks these movements can bring. As your baby develops the strength to be able to sit up or get on to all fours there will be a whole new set of potential hazards.

You can get further information about looking after your baby from your health visitor.

This booklet will help you look forward to those first stages and enjoy getting to know your baby in safe surroundings.

Contact Child Accident Prevention Trust again before your baby starts crawling – we can send you a new set of information to help you safely through the next stages.

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before

your baby

is born

and the first few months

This section covers the basic equipment you may need to buy before you bring your baby home or when he or she is a few months old.

Having a baby can be expensive but it is worth looking for well made products that are tested to current British or European Standards to help you make a safer choice. The following advice should help you decide what to buy and how to use it safely.

Cots, cribs and moses baskets

A cot, crib or moses basket may be the first major purchase you make for your new baby.

Look for a cot mattress that is made to BS 1877 and BS 7177. Make sure it is firm and fits the cot - there should not be a gap of more than 4cm (2") anywhere between the edge of the mattress and the bars of the cot. If the gap is bigger than this your baby's head may become trapped causing suffocation.

Cot bumpers should be used with caution. They can cause your baby to over-heat because they trap air in the cot. They can also be used to climb on once your baby is crawling and so can increase the risk of your baby falling from the cot.

Cots can be used from birth until about 18 months to two years. Look for BS EN 716. If you buy a new cot and look for this standard it will have been designed to make sure that your baby cannot easily fall out or get his or her head trapped between the bars. If you buy a second-hand cot or are given one from a friend or family member, you can check the important measurements yourself. The cot should be at least 49.5cm (20") deep to make sure your baby cannot climb out and bars should be vertical with spacing of 4.5cm to 6.5cm (2" to 3") between them.

Cots are suitable from newborn until your baby starts to sit up, kneel or get on all fours (usually around three to four months). At this stage babies are beginning to have the strength they need to climb out of the crib and you should stop using it immediately. Cots should be on a firm stand and any swinging mechanism should be lockable.
Pushchairs

As a new parent you will want a pram, carrycot, pushchair or buggy. Look for BS 7409 when you are buying a new one or use the advice below to check out a second-hand one.

Newborn babies need to be carried flat. Prams and carrycots are usually suitable from birth but not all pushchairs and buggies can be adjusted to let your baby be carried flat.

Ask advice when you are buying to make sure you choose a suitable model. Think as well about how you will use your pushchair or buggy. If you have to get it on and off public transport or regularly carry it up stairs make sure you are able to do so comfortably.

You should consider all of the following safety points when choosing or using your pram, pushchair or buggy. They are relevant to all makes and types:

- All new pushchairs now come with a five-point harness. If you have a second-hand pushchair you may need to buy a harness separately. If so, look for BS 6684 – see the diagram opposite.

- Check the brakes. Make sure they work well with the weight of your baby in the pushchair. Test on a slope as well as on a flat surface. If you are buying a second-hand pushchair check the fabric areas to make sure that no sharp pieces of metal have worn through. Test the brakes and overall condition of your pushchair every few months.

- Check that the pushchair cannot fold up when your baby is in it – there should be a safety locking device to prevent it from doing this.

- Be aware of places where your baby’s fingers can get trapped.

- Make sure your baby’s feet cannot trail on the ground. Guards or shopping trays below the footrest can help prevent this.

- Do not overload your pushchair – in particular avoid hanging bags on the handles. This can unbalance the pushchair and cause it to tip up even when your child is sitting in it.

Moses baskets can be used from newborn until your baby starts to sit, kneel or get on all fours (usually at around three to four months). At this stage you should stop using a moses basket. Look for BS EN 1466.

Moses baskets should not be used to carry your baby. Accidents have happened when babies have slipped out of moses baskets – particularly while being carried down stairs.

take care when crossing the road – especially where there are parked cars. Make sure there is no approaching traffic before you push the pushchair off the kerb. Reflective stickers can help make your pushchair more visible at night or in poor weather.
Slings and backpacks for carrying babies

You may prefer to carry your baby in a sling or backpack. Look for one that is sturdy and comfortable and that fastens with clips rather than straps that could work loose. If your baby is under three months old make sure there is head support.

Most accidents involving slings or backpacks happen when parents fall over and crush the baby while wearing them. Make sure you are wearing suitable shoes and are particularly careful in slippery conditions.

Bouncing cradles

A bouncing cradle is not an essential piece of equipment but can be a convenient first seat for your baby. If you are choosing a bouncing cradle for a new born baby make sure it has firm back support and only use it for short periods. Never put a bouncing cradle on a high surface. Even a very young baby will kick and wriggle and these movements can cause the cradle to move. Babies have been injured when their bouncing cradles have fallen from tables or kitchen work surfaces.

Smoke alarms

You should already have at least one working smoke alarm in your home. They give you vital extra time to get out of your house in the event of a fire. Test the alarm regularly and replace the battery at least every year. You might want to choose a memorable date such as your new baby’s birthday to make sure this happens. You can also get smoke alarms that have ten year batteries or are wired in to the mains.

Make sure there are no sharp edges on the tray and check regularly to see that there are no loose nuts or other small parts. Do not use a chair if the plastic has split and any foam is exposed.

Never leave a child unattended in a highchair - especially if they are by a table. They could easily push the chair back with their feet and fall over.

Be careful if using a folding highchair. Make sure the weight of your baby keeps it open.

If you are using a table mounted chair look for one that is made to BS EN 1272. Use it on a solid table. Do not use on glass or single pedestal tables.

Highchairs

Highchairs are intended for babies from about six months old. Look for BS 6799 when buying one. If used properly a highchair is a safe piece of equipment which enables your baby to sit securely at meal times.

Highchair accidents are not common but the most serious happen when babies fall out of the chair. It is therefore very important to buy a highchair with an integral five-point harness or to fit one yourself. If you are buying a separate harness look for one made to BS 6684. Use the harness every time you use the chair. The crotch strap alone will not be sufficient to hold your baby securely.