

BACKGROUND

There are many reasons for using a walker with your child. It is important that the walker your child uses is right for them, and suits the skills they have. The physiotherapist will help you to work out if your child can use a walker, and the best type of walker for them.

Some reasons for using a walker may include:



- Giving your child a chance to move on their own and explore their environment.
- Helping your child to interact with family and friends.
- Helping them to join in Physical Education sessions at school.
- Providing a change in position.
- Helping bone and joints to develop.
- Keeping muscles strong and supple.
- Improving fitness and circulation.
- Improving bladder and bowel function.
- Boosting your child's confidence.

While it is important to let your child discover their world by using their new walker, some simple guidelines will ensure this occurs safely.

SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR USING A WALKER

Supervision

- For younger children, or for the child that has difficulty understanding the concept of safety, ensure **constant supervision**.
- Be aware –that once a child becomes mobile, they may be able to reach areas that they couldn't before, such as:
 - Stairs
 - Curbs
 - Tops of cupboards
 - Stoves

- Pot plants
- Table cloth edges
- Ledges
- Driveways
- Hills.
- Fit a **safety gate in front of stairwells** if there is no door which can be closed to stop your child going near them (very important when the walker is new to your child or if your child doesn't understand the possible dangers involved).
- Peripheral vision (the ability to see things out of the 'corner of your eye' without turning your head) and depth perception (ability to see height differences, such as with steps), are not fully developed in young children – this may mean your child will have problems spotting obstacles, or other dangers such as steps or pot-holes.
- Encourage and teach your child to be aware of obstacles and other hazards.
- Always **closely supervise** your child when going into new environments with their walker.

Using the walker

- Speak to the physiotherapist about how and where to use the walker with your child, for example, the walker may not be suitable to use over long distances, when your child may get too tired.
- **Not all walkers can be used outdoors.** Indoor walkers usually have small wheels that can catch or become jammed on rough or uneven surfaces. This could cause your child to trip, or the walker to tip over. Outdoor walkers have larger wheels and can generally cope with rougher surfaces. Check with the physiotherapist to find out if it is OK to use the walker outdoors.
- Don't allow other children to play or ride on your child's walker or pull your child along in the walker.
- Be cautious on uneven ground (for example, cracks in pavements) or busy environments with lots of people around.
- Ensure safety straps (if fitted) are secure at all times.
- **Practice safe transfers** in and out of the walker with your child. The physiotherapist can provide advice about how best to do this. It is important that teachers and carers also know how to assist your child to get in and out of the walker safely.

- Whenever possible, ensure a clear path for the walker, to reduce the chance of your child tripping. Examples of things to look out for include:
 - Rugs
 - Slippery or wet surfaces
 - Small lips where floor surfaces change
 - Toys.

Taking care of the walker

- Keep the walker clean and dry.
- Regularly check the walker for broken or worn parts - contact the physiotherapist if any repairs are needed, or if you are concerned.
- Sand and salt water don't mix with walkers, so avoid taking it to the beach!
- Children grow! Contact the physiotherapist to adjust the walker if your child has grown. Some walkers have manufacturer recommendations regarding how high they can be raised, as they can become unstable or 'tippy'. This is why it is important to contact the physiotherapist, rather than adjusting the walker yourself.
- If your child's physical skills change, or you have any concerns about how your child looks or uses the walker, contact the physiotherapist.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Novita clients and their parents/carers should contact their physiotherapist.

Disclaimer: This information is of a general nature only and does not constitute advice. Novita Children's Services makes no representations as to the accuracy, usefulness, suitability or application of the information to a child's particular circumstances. You should seek professional advice before acting or relying on the information.