

Do Kids Need To Crawl?

By Angela English, DC

From the day your child is born, you look forward to witnessing life develop in front of your eyes. Living in a competitive world and seeing any delay in your child's development can be very frustrating and worrisome. Why do some kids reach milestones such as rolling over, crawling, walking, talking, etc, before others? And why do some miss the milestone of crawling all together?

One thing that we know for sure is that we all mature at our own rates. Some infants get teeth before others, some walk before others, some talk before others and the list goes on and on. Crawling has somehow fallen under the radar of a lot of parents as being important. In fact some parents even think their children have a step ahead of other kids if they don't crawl. "My child is so smart that he skipped crawling and went right into walking" has been heard around the parenting circles many times, but this is actually far from being true.

Crawling is a very important action for a child to do to help develop his nervous system and spinal curvatures. It provides communication from the brain to the rest of the body across midline, ie: the right brain communicates and coordinates movement with the left side of the body and registers through touch and body awareness on what is going with the body as it is moving. It also activates the vestibular and proprioceptive systems which help with balance and sensory development of the child. Research has shown that crawling has also helps academic performance later in life opposed to those children that did not crawl.

When a child does not crawl, it can be because of a few reasons. More and more it tends to be because a child is often in a Johnny Jump Up or walkers on a daily basis and therefore children are more used to being upright. Children who spend more time in this upright position tend to be "toe walkers" when they start walking and have a straighter spine or "military spine", which can lead to back problems later in life. Parents are told by their pediatricians not to let their babies sleep on their tummies at night due to SIDS and babies suffocating themselves in that position and then don't let their children have much tummy time during the day either. Children are also starting day care at very young ages where it is hard to have one on one time with any child to encourage tummy time and crawling. Tummy time can easily be achieved by letting the child lay on the parents lap or on a blanket on the floor for short periods of time while being supervised. When this is not encouraged in infancy, the child can start to be more scared or irritated by being on their tummies than what is usual.

There are actually neurological disorders including Cerebral Palsy, autism and other spectrum disorders, learning disorders and more which make cross crawl type movements very difficult for the child and parents to do on their own. In these cases, physical therapy, occupational therapists and chiropractic professionals that are trained in pediatrics and neurosensory disorders can make a big difference in your child's future development.

Parents on their own should be encouraging the crawling motion and can walk their child through those motions. This can easily be done when a child gets their diaper changed by moving the child's opposite arm and leg up and down in a crawling motion and can do a few times on each side before switching to the opposite side. Doing these motions to a tempo such as counting or singing and moving to the beat can really encourage these kids to create these neurological pathways. These should be done with any child of any age that did not crawl. The more a child crawls the faster these pathways communicate and can make almost every action easier as the child continues to develop.