

An Ounce Of Prevention

*The University of Pittsburgh
Office of Child Development*

Darlene's son is getting more mobile by the minute and everywhere she turns she sees an accident waiting to happen.

Good for Darlene. Accidents are the fifth leading cause of death among infants under the age of one and the leading cause for older children.

Parents need to be aware of household dangers, and do something about them. Most accidents are preventable. Most precautions are little more than common sense.

Never feed a baby large or hard pieces of food. Don't allow any object that can be swallowed whole near your baby. Avoid propping up a bottle or feeding your baby in bed. And learn how to come to the aid of a choking baby.

When in the car, always use an approved car seat or restraint.

Cribs and playpens can be dangerous if their slats are wide enough that a baby's head can fit through. The slats should be no more than 2 3/8 inches apart.

Balloons, pillows, plastic bags, and strings or cords can suffocate a baby. Keep them away from baby, crib, and playpen.

If you smoke, don't around your baby.

Keep your baby away from hot objects and liquids, such as your coffee. Keep your baby out of the kitchen when you're cooking.

Lower the water temperature in your house to 120 to 130 degrees. Always test it before putting your baby in the tub.

Insert blind plugs into all unused electrical sockets.

Babies can easily fall from a bed, changing table, chair, and down a set of stairs. Don't leave your baby out of your touch or unrestrained in such situations.

During bathtime, always keep one hand on your baby. And be careful – a wet baby can be amazingly slippery and squirmy. Never leave your baby alone in the bath or near a swimming pool, toilet, or even a water bucket.

Poisons, medicines, paints, cleaners, and other harmful liquids and substances should be out of a baby's reach. They should be on a high shelf or stored in cabinets secured by child-proof locks. Have a bottle of syrup of ipecac available to induce vomiting in an emergency, but only if instructed by a doctor or poison-control center. Keep the poison-control center phone number handy.

Most accidents can be prevented with a little common sense. But you can't prevent all of them. Take precautions, but leave room for play, fun, and life.

This column is written by Robert B. McCall, Co-Director of the Office of Child Development and Professor of Psychology, and is provided as a public service by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.