

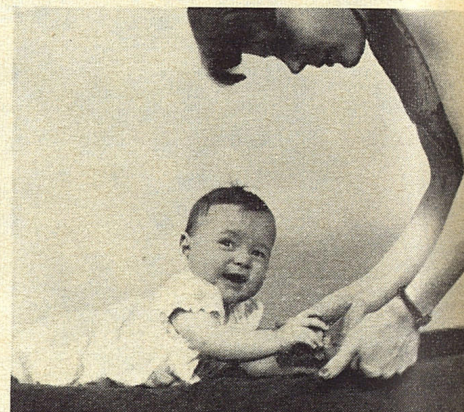
HOW TO HELP YOUR BABY Grow Straight

BY SONYA WEBER, D.Sc.

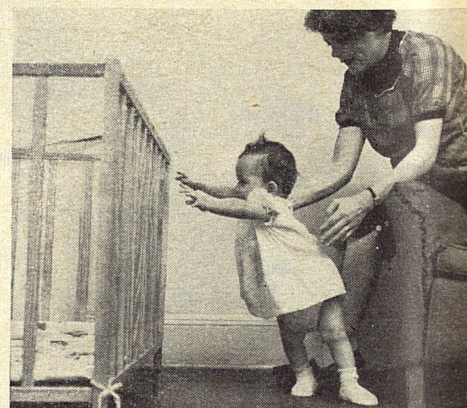
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This is part of the business of growing: freedom to stretch and strengthen muscles eager for climbing.



Lying on a flat surface makes it easier to raise his head.



First steps—mother's policy is stand by but hands off.

When 11,000 American school children were examined recently, well over fifty percent showed muscular deficiency. In this article, a specialist in physical growth tells how to avoid such a possibility by starting in babyhood to build for strength and sturdiness

YOU can almost see a baby grow. And what a miracle it is to watch him change in breathtakingly little time from a helpless, supine creature into a child who stands on his own small feet . . . takes one step . . . then another step . . . and walks! Have you any idea, though, how much his skeletal and muscular structure must accomplish in his first two years if he is to move efficiently and with balance—and do you know what part you, his mother, play, in that accomplishment?

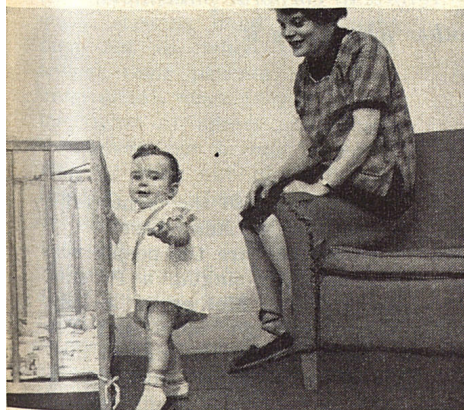
Look at the newborn baby. He has pretty much

And Strong

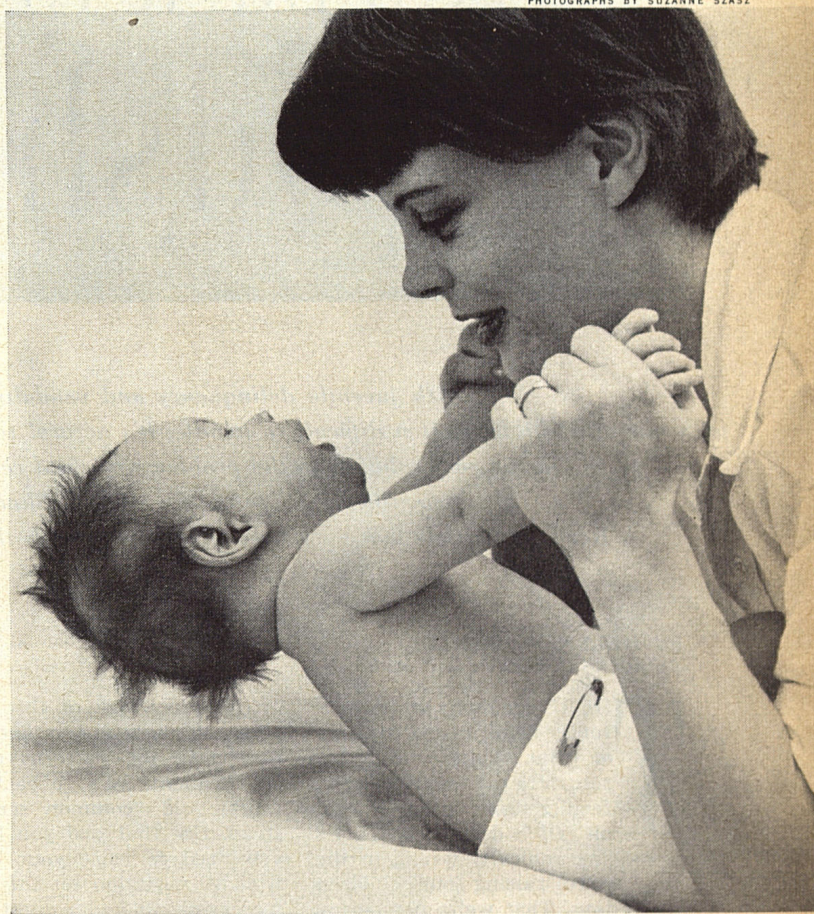
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SUZANNE SZASZ



Too long standing on yielding surfaces may harm arch growth.



No urging, no help—and your baby will walk when ready.



Playing Pull-Me-Up exercises abdominal muscles. There's love, fun, sharing in this mother-baby game.

the same curled-up position that he had before birth. He seems boneless. Actually he has bone and muscle aplenty. But many changes must take place beneath his soft pink flesh if his body is to become strong and straight. And he hasn't much time to accomplish them. In just a couple of years his body segments—head, trunk and legs—must be aligned vertically. Just as your baby will someday build a column of blocks, so these segments of his body must someday balance as squarely as possible on top of each other. Muscles hold those

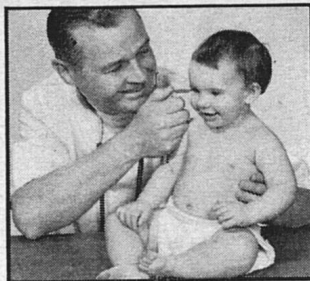
body segments in place. Muscles that *bend* the joints are opposed by muscles that *straighten* the joints. If one muscle group is strong, well-developed and its opposing group is weak, some part of the body will be pulled out of alignment. At the same time, all the muscles must increase in strength and some must increase in elasticity and length as well.

All these fundamental changes take place gradually in the first two years of growth—**crucial postural years**. And all of them can be nourished by you. "Nourished" in this (Continued on page 86)

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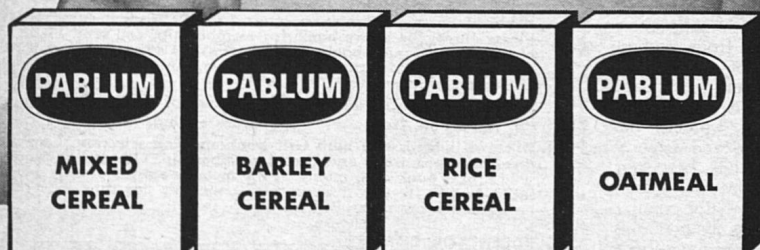


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HELP YOUR BABY

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case has nothing to do with nutrition. There are many other things aside from furnishing a balanced diet that mothers and fathers can do, or refrain from doing, to promote the development of good posture.

What you give your baby to lie on is important. He spends most of his early life lying down and when you provide him with a firm, flat mattress, his flexible spine can lie straight. This applies to carriage and bassinet as well as to crib. If your infant is resting on a folded blanket or a pillow when he's out for his airings, put a piece of plywood or several layers of heavy cardboard underneath, so that the foundation at least is firm. The proper mattress has another advantage, too. Very soon, when you place him on his stomach, he will want to raise his head and he can lift and turn it easily if he doesn't have to cope with the humps of a soft mattress or a pillow. His urge to get that wobbly head up uses upper back and neck muscles.

Exercise is necessary for good posture development and some of the things you may do just for fun are fine exercise for your baby. Once he is getting along pretty well with that head-lifting—so that you don't have the feeling his head will fall off—you can start pulling him up slowly by the hands into a sitting position, letting him exert as much effort himself as he wants. This is not a suggestion, of course, that you teach him to sit up. Babies do that when they're ready for it. But the raising and lowering call many parts of his body into use. Almost every baby, at first, will flex his arms and not allow the pull to reach to his abdomen. Pretty soon, however, in pulling himself up he will be using abdominal muscles. Another exercise is playing peek-a-boo while he is on his stomach, encouraging the lifting and turning of his head which uses back muscles.

Plenty of room is an infallible prescription for your baby when he begins to move about. Think of some of the effects of confinement on those bones and muscles that are eager to get into action. When a baby begins to roll around, meeting up with the sides of an outgrown bassinet may put a damper on his rolling activity. Whenever you can, give him freedom to squirm about on a blanket on the floor. Sleeping garments that aren't spacious enough, blankets that weigh him down prove too much for him to cope with and so discourage his incipient urge to move about. Perhaps you've set up a sparkling crib toy or "gym" to furnish incentive for stretching and reaching. This is fine, for it gives his abdominal muscles a workout, too. But if his sweaters and shirts are too tight, will he feel it's worth the struggle? Even clothes that chafe may inhibit the most determined muscles. If the legs of his pants are tight and irritate his

skin, for instance, a baby may find that keeping his knees bent in some special way minimizes the chafing—and then what chance do those opposing straightening muscles have to come into their own?

When he starts to creep, give a thought to his toys. Balls, bright toys that he can push across the room, give him something to go after. Pushing the legs to make the creeping movements lengthens and brings into better alignment the muscles he will have to use for erect posture. Certainly, a play pen is a blessing when you're cooking and don't want the creeper demonstrating his legwork under your feet—but don't overdo confinement. Folding gates can shut off danger areas like stairs if you want to give your young explorer the wide open spaces of a whole room. Of course, the time will come when nothing in the world can keep him from the challenge of those stairs and he should have the chance to climb them under your watchful eye or be given some substitute like a short flight of steps or stacked wooden boxes for climbing activities.

Let him climb. Climbing stairs uses practically all of his muscles. At first he moves carefully on hands and knees, and the benefits are the same as those of creeping. When he begins to walk up and down the stairs, it is principally the leg and thigh muscles that are strengthened. At the same time, a great deal is required in the way of coordination of all body muscles in order to raise and lower himself from step to step and still keep balance in shifting his weight. If you watch, you will feel a little parental thrill at seeing your child return momentarily to the creeping position, baffled by this great problem of balance. But then he tries, tries again and someday discards the supporting hand or rail with a triumphant smile which broadens at your applause.

Do nothing—that's how you do most when your baby begins to pull himself up in those first efforts to stand. The impulse is hard to control at times and of course a helping hand is needed once in a while to get him out of a bad spot. But the more he can work at pulling himself up and letting himself down, the better it is for him. As the muscles he needs to lift himself up contract and shorten, the opposing muscle groups must relax and lengthen. In letting himself down, the reverse occurs—so that strength and elasticity in all muscles are improved. In connection with standing, a point not often considered is that long periods of standing on soft surfaces can have bad effects on posture. No matter how firm his crib mattress, if a baby spends too much time on Sunday mornings standing up on it, flat feet and knock-knees may be encouraged. The feet spread and turn in on their sides, for the arch is not yet well-developed.

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HELP YOUR BABY

(Continued from page 87)

Never urge a child to stand and walk before the necessary muscle changes have taken place—in other words, before he shows that he is completely ready to do it himself. If the adjustment at knee and hip joints is not completed, the baby will compensate, if forced into a standing position, by curving the lower back in order to bring his head up. This is potential swayback—an abnormal increase in the forward curve of the lower spine. It pushes the abdomen forward, too. Thus shifted forward, the weight of the abdomen must later be compensated for by an increase of the backward curve in the upper back—result: a rounded back or humped shoulders. Carrying the process further still, the round back and forward humped shoulders interfere with breathing and normal chest expansion. The ribs are pushed down and in turn push down on the abdomen, increasing the swayback. The swayback—well, you can see the vicious circle. So your baby is showing a lot of natural common sense in waiting until his body feels capable of standing and walking.

Socks are important. How often do you get new ones for your infant? Most parents are well aware today of the need for room in shoes. But it is amazing how many cases of curled toes occur because socks are overlooked. If they are too short, they can be just as restricting as shoes that are too tight or too short and it is a good idea to check up on the fit of socks at regular intervals of a few weeks or so.

But growth isn't entirely physical. It has its emotional aspects, too, and your love for your baby and your respect for his individuality help him grow and develop. He needs your love and understanding in order to stand straight and stride high. Lack of support from a sagging bed can make him droop—but so can lack of support from you. The creeper who is reined in by "no" every time he makes a move in the direction of some forbidden object (which could just as well be kept out of reach) can feel the disapproval bringing his muscles up short. The youngster who comes to feel inadequate because from a parent's point of view he isn't walking soon enough or talking soon enough or is "behind" in toilet training, isn't likely to be the one who swings along with his chin up, free and self-assured and untrammelled.

We have all experienced muscular tension due to some emotional upset—anger, perhaps, or anxiety. And we have all occasionally had that tired, no-muscle-at-all feeling from sorrow or frustration. If a child is never really happy, his shoulders can't very well be straight, his stomach muscles firm. A classic example of emotional-muscular interaction is that of the teen-age girl who humps her shoulders to hide

developing breasts, embarrassed by her approaching womanliness.

Out of 11,000 school children from six to sixteen, 56.6 percent showed muscular deficiencies. This was the appalling conclusion drawn from examinations conducted by Dr. Hans Kraus, Associate Professor, Mrs. Ruth P. Hirschland, Research Assistant at New York University, and myself. It means to researchers that these children lacked strength or elasticity in one or more of the muscle groups used in normal daily living. What it represents to the children is something else again. It can mean, first of all, listlessness. They tire easily, because so much extra energy has to be channeled into accomplishing ordinary body movements like walking—or simply sitting down and getting up. It can mean their personal picture of how they must look to others is an unhappy picture. It can mean greater susceptibility to illness, a variety of aches and pains. Later on, it is very likely to mean foot and backaches.

A surprising number of young American women complain of backache. And in a survey made shortly after World War II to investigate painful low back conditions in civilians—since this condition incapacitated so many service men during the war—it was found that of 4,000 patients sixty percent were incapacitated by muscular deficiency and imbalance. In comparison with most other countries, our children are the best-nourished, best-housed, best-

OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF BABES

Upon returning from a birthday party at a neighbor's home, our 3-and-a-half-year-old son was asked, "What games did you play?" To which he promptly replied, "London breeches falling down."—C. H., Texas

educated, best-everythinged, but far from the top in muscular fitness. It's high time, then, that we begin to learn more and pay more attention to postural development.

Just what then does good posture mean? For most of us, it still calls up some vision of a figure standing still with an imaginary book on his head—"chin up . . . shoulders back . . . stomach in!" This stationary ramrod is not necessarily enjoying good posture at all. Good posture means using all the parts of the body with maximum ease and grace, with a minimum expenditure of energy. Those parts are constantly shifting in their relationship to each other. The muscles and bones are constantly at work. If he gets off to a bad start as a baby, poor posture can eventually keep your child from functioning at his best. With good posture, he is poised, alive, energetic—not merely standing erect, but moving through the world with a strong, straight backbone, a sense of well-being and enthusiasm for living.

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