

Child development varies and is hard to predict, study finds

March 28 2013

On average, children take the first steps on their own at the age of 12 months. Many parents perceive this event as a decisive turning point. However, the timing is really of no consequence. Children who start walking early turn out later to be neither more intelligent nor more well-coordinated. This is the conclusion reached by a study supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).

Because parents pay great attention to their offspring, they often compare them with the other children in the sandpit or playground. Many of them worry that their child is lagging behind in terms of mental development if it sits up or starts to walk a bit later than other children. Now, however, in a [statistical analysis](#) of the developmental data of 222 children born healthy, researchers headed by Oskar Jenni of the Zurich Children's Hospital and Valentin Rousson of Lausanne University have come to the conclusion that most of these fears are groundless.

Considerable variance

Within the framework of the Zurich [longitudinal study](#), the paediatricians conducted a detailed study of the development of 119 boys and 103 girls. The researchers examined the children seven times during the first two years of their life and subsequently carried out motor and [intelligence tests](#) with them every two to three years after they reached school [age](#). The results show that children sit up for the first time at an age of between slightly less than four months and thirteen

months (average 6.5 months). They begin to walk at an age of between 8.5 months and 20 months (average 12 months). In other words, there is considerable variance.

The researchers found no correlation between the age at which the children reached these motor milestones and their performance in the intelligence and motor tests between the age of seven and eighteen. In short, by the time they reach school age, [children](#) who start walking later than others are just as well-coordinated and intelligent as those who were up on their feet early.

More relaxed

Although the first steps that a child takes on its own represent a decisive turning point for most parents, the precise timing of this event is manifestly of no consequence. "That's why I advise parents to be more relaxed if their child only starts walking at 16 or 18 months," says Jenni. If a child still can't walk unaided after 20 months, then further medical investigations are indicated.

More information: Oskar, G. et al. (2013) Infant motor milestones: poor predictive value for outcome of healthy children. *Acta Paediatrica* online. [doi:10.1111/apa.12129](https://doi.org/10.1111/apa.12129)

Provided by Swiss National Science Foundation

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