

Those baby 'milestones' may have longer-term importance

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(HealthDay)—Babies who learn to stand up relatively early may also do

a bit better with attention, memory and learning by the time they are preschoolers, a new study suggests.

Experts have known that significant delays in reaching movement "milestones"—such as crawling, standing and walking—are a sign that a baby may go on to have developmental disabilities.

But the new study found a pattern even among [babies](#) who hit those milestones within the "normal" time frame. Those who reached certain milestones sooner tended to have higher scores on some developmental measures by the time they were 4 years old.

Specifically, babies who learned to stand with assistance relatively early had higher scores on tests of "cognition" at [age](#) 4. That refers to a young child's ability to pay attention, learn and remember.

Preschoolers who'd hit the standing milestone sooner also tended to score higher on "adaptive" skills—such as using utensils and helping to dress themselves.

Although this research couldn't definitively prove cause-and-effect, the researchers wrote, "This study provides evidence that the age of achieving motor milestones may be an important basis for various aspects of later child development."

The research team—led by Edwina Yeung, of the U.S. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development—also noted that past studies have found a connection between age at standing and IQ in adolescence, as well as mental skills in adulthood.

Still, a pediatrician who reviewed the study cautioned against making too much of the findings.

"Every child is different, and we can't put them in a box," said Dr. Gloria Riefkohl, a pediatrician at Nicklaus Children's Hospital, in Miami.

The fact that one baby stands a little later than her peers doesn't automatically mean there's a problem, Riefkohl said. By the same token, she noted, early standing doesn't mean a baby will cruise through childhood with no developmental issues.

Riefkohl also pointed out that "gross motor" skills—crawling, standing, walking—are only one facet of early childhood development. There's also language and social development, for instance.

The current study found no connection between movement milestones and a child's communication or social skills at the age of 4.

The findings are based on 599 children whose mothers kept journals to record their milestone achievement. On average, the babies learned to crawl and stand with assistance at around 9 months of age; they were able to stand on their own at 11 months, and walk on their own at 13 months—again, on average.

In general, Yeung's team found, babies who stood with assistance relatively earlier did a bit better on cognitive and adaptive-skills tests at age 4.

And when the researchers focused only on children with no developmental disabilities, early crawlers also tended to do better on the developmental tests.

Those connections were, however, only seen among single-birth babies—not twins. According to Yeung's team, that may be because twins are often born preterm and underweight. Those are key factors in a

child's development, and might "overshadow" any link between movement milestones and overall development.

The researchers speculated on some reasons for their findings. For example, there is evidence that some of the same brain structures that underlie movement skills also play a role in thinking, memory and learning.

But it's not clear why some milestones—such as walking—were unrelated to a child's later development.

According to Riefkohl, the bottom line for parents is this: Take your baby to the pediatrician for routine well-child visits, and bring up any concerns you have about "late" development.

If there is an issue, Riefkohl said, your doctor can refer you to any special services that might be needed—such as speech or movement therapy.

But she also cautioned against comparing your baby to another, including siblings. "Not every child is going to have 200 words at the age of 2," Riefkohl said. "No child is exactly like any other."

The study was published online June 27 in *Pediatrics*.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [infant milestones](#).

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