

Do the Stroll

*A Stroller
With the
Right Fit
Can Make
Walking
With Baby
Safer and
More Fun*



By Lori Zanteson

For some parents, it's just a way to get the baby from point A to point B. For others, it's a fitness regimen. But whether you stroll or power-walk, whether you roll with a simple umbrella or a high-tech suspension jogger, if you're a parent you've got to have a stroller.

Get the fit right, and you can get a great workout – or at least a more comfortable, convenient strolling experience. It can even be fun.

Workin' It

Clearly, walking or running while pushing a stroller takes more work than walking or running alone. A 2005 study published in the *Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness* found that parents who ran with a stroller had “significantly higher” heart and breathing rates than those running without. And a 2007 study in the *Journal of Cardiopulmonary Rehabilitation and Prevention* found walking with a stroller a good way to boost your cardio and improve body composition.

But most parents can tell you that the added “resistance” from your child's weight makes the workout more intense. Plus, strolling also works your arms and abdominals as you turn and maneuver the stroller.

Gearing Up

The array of strollers out there is a lot to sift through, even for a multitasking parent. There are travel strollers, standard strollers, carriages and joggers. Add to the confusion the hybrid stroller that claims to do it all. Unfortunately, the only way to have a stroller that can do it all is to own three. Since most parents have more than enough baby equipment, it's really best to just find one stroller that best meets your family's needs.

Stroller expert Kelly Morse, of JoggerMom.com, says a front-wheel swivel with a fixed option is “definitely what you want” in an all-around stroller. A relatively recent feature, the swivel makes general walking easier while the fixed or locked position is better for running. Morse cautions, however, that the front wheel will eventually

wear down and start to shimmy (wobble back and forth), adding unwanted resistance.

Then there's wheel size. Your options are 12, 16 and 20 inches, and the larger the wheel, the easier the stroller is to control. Morse suggests a 16-inch as the best all-purpose choice, while serious runners will want 20-inch wheels. Be sure your stroller has a simple fold system to quickly and easily store in the trunk.

Your stroller also has to fit your baby – safely and comfortably. A stroller with a reclining seat or a car seat adapter helps ensure baby's head doesn't fall forward. It is also more comfortable for sleeping. Be sure the stroller has a five-point harness to secure baby against quick stops or wiggly climbing.

Kristen Horler, founder and CEO of Baby Boot Camp, recommends choosing a model with hand brakes to help slow the stroller during downhill, a rear brake for parking and a safety leash for added security. Even with these features, experts recommend that the baby be 6 to 8 weeks old before you venture out for a walk and 6 months old for jogging.

It'll Cost You

You get what you pay for in a stroller. Morse cautions against buying anything under \$100 because it won't last. Expect to pay between \$300 and \$600 for a quality stroller. The bigger price tag buys quality fabric, larger hood (sun protection) and basket size, and will fit your child longer. A gently used stroller can be a more economical way to get the model you want. Check online sites like Craigs List or resale children's shops.

Walk, jog and run with several models before you buy, since your stride will change with each mode. Many models now come with an adjustable handlebar, so you can position it based on your height. This is ideal if both you and your partner will be pushing. Horler says to position the bar

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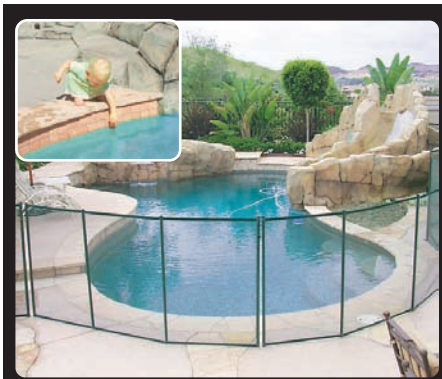
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so that your arms are bent about five degrees below the elbow for power walking and 10 degrees below for running.

Talking About Technique

Proper stroller posture and technique ensure optimal and pain-free strolling. This is extra important for nursing moms who are so often hunched over baby. Kristy Sketeris, a Monrovia-based Stroller Strides instructor, says that we hold tension in our muscles, causing our shoulders to ride up and our backs to hunch forward. As you stroll, cue yourself into good posture with Kristen Horler's easy-to-remember acronym:

Wrist is neutral
A bdominals are pulled in
S houlders are down and relaxed
H ips are forward, toward the stroller

Keeping your stroller well maintained and in top condition will also help ensure good posture and comfort. Horler recommends taking your stroller to a bike shop for a tune-up twice a year. They'll keep the bearings lubed, the brakes adjusted, and the stroller tracking so it rolls straight without veering to the right or left. You can check the tires regularly yourself to keep them properly inflated.

Once you have a stroller that fits, your baby on board and the right posture, you're ready to hit the road. And because strolling is a great way to connect with the kids in the great outdoors and a good chance to model a healthy lifestyle, you'll find you're in good company. Find one of many groups in the growing population of "strollers" who socialize, exercise and play together, or do it on your own. Either way, give it a stroll! ♦

Lori Zanteson is a Monrovia mom, writer and stroller.