

Doc Talk

By Dr. Veronica Naudin



Wheels - Keep *them* safe...Keep *you* sane!

Q: My husband wants to buy my 4 year old a skateboard for his birthday, I don't think this is a good idea. What do you think?

A: Your question is a good one. Skateboarding has become very popular in the last 5 - 10 years. With kids watching extreme sports and new skateboarding athleticism, children are becoming interested in skateboarding at a younger age. But skateboarding can be dangerous. Parents need to be cautious about introducing skateboarding to their children.

Skateboarding related injuries account for 50,000 emergency room visits and 1500 hospitalizations among children and adolescents in the United States each year. The majority of these injuries are broken or fractured arms and legs; a few of these injuries are acute head injuries. A head injury in these cases may be a mild or moderate concussion but could also be bleeding in the brain, which could cause brain damage. It may be possible to decrease the risks by riding safely. The American Academy of Pediatrics recently published the following recommendations for childhood skateboarding:

- * Children riding skateboards and scooters should not ride in traffic.
- Children and adolescents should wear appropriate protective gear, especially helmets.
- Close adult supervision is recommended for beginning skateboarders.
- Skateboarding should not be started until children are over age 5 and have developed appropriate motor skills to handle the complexities of skateboarding.

Why are young children at risk?

To understand the issue, it is important to discuss the developmental reasons that affect skateboarding performance in the young child. Young children may be at risk of injury because of lack of judgement. They often overestimate their abilities. This is especially true for some children who seemingly have no fear. As my husband points out, our 4 year old son is a bad combination of minimal skills and maximal confidence. He needs constant supervision for all outdoor activities. In addition to poor judgement, younger children have a center of gravity that is higher than that of older children and

adults and their neuromuscular system is not well developed. Therefore, they have a decreased ability to protect themselves from injury.

Are there any alternatives?

You might consider mastering bicycle riding for your 4 year old. Some 4 year olds are ready to have their training wheels removed and can ride a 2 wheel with good balance. Others find that it is too stressful and would rather ride with training wheels. In addition, the California Chariot and Skooch provide the ability to ride in a fashion similar to the skateboard and scooter but seem to be safer alternatives because they do not require as much ability to balance safely. Only you as your child's parents can make the best determination of your child's skills. And remember, all of these activities require close adult supervision for children aged 4 - 10.

What about a Scooter?

The new lightweight scooters are relatively new. Safety data is just emerging. However, preliminary data suggests that young children riding scooters are at risk for the same injuries as children riding skateboards. The American Academy of Pediatrics, however, recommends that children not begin riding scooters until they are 8 years old. To decrease the incidence of accidents for scooter riders, children should not ride scooters on streets, at night or on any surfaces that have water, sand gravel or dirt.

Good luck with your decision. If you have any further questions, please discuss this issue with your child's pediatrician.

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Please send questions and/or suggestions to:

Doc Talk, c/o PPCAMG,
2067 Vista Way #180, Vista, CA 92083
or call: (760) 945-3434 or fax: (760) 945-6761