



steps

We don't take walking for granted

A Parent's Guide to Caring for a Child in a Pavlik Harness



Helpful Information from Steps Charity



Contents

1 How This Booklet Might Help

2 Help When You Need It

3 About the Pavlik Harness

3 What conditions require a Pavlik harness?

3 What is a Pavlik harness?

4 How is the Pavlik harness first put on?

4 How long will my baby have to wear the Pavlik harness?

5 Caring for a Baby in a Pavlik Harness

5 Will my child need any special equipment?

5 Is there equipment that I should avoid using?

5 Can I use a sling or a baby carrier?

6 Can the Pavlik harness be removed during this time?

6 How will I know if the Pavlik harness is working?

7 Nappy changes

7 Keeping clean and skin care

8 Clothing

8 Sleeping

9 Play time & tummy time

9 Feeding

10 Car seats and pushchairs

10 .. Life After Your Pavlik Harness

10 Removal of the harness

11 What happens if the hips do not correct with the Pavlik harness?

11 What happens when treatment is successful?

12 Impact on the family

12 Frequently asked questions about the Pavlik harness

13 .. Who are Steps and How Can They Help?

14 .. Contributors

14 .. Disclaimer

How This Booklet Might Help

At [Steps](#), we understand how a lower limb condition can affect individuals, families, and communities. We are committed to helping people understand these conditions, offering reassurance, and working towards a better future through our partnerships with national health services and research projects.

This booklet is for all parents whose child may need to wear a Pavlik harness. It explains what a Pavlik harness is, why it might be prescribed and how to care for your child while they use it. It cannot answer every question about what the future may hold, but we hope it will reassure you. We aim to show that practical help, specialist medical information, emotional support, and signposting to other sources of information are available if needed.



Having this information may help you feel more prepared for the road ahead and better able to ask informed questions about your child's care, treatment, and prognosis.



Help When You Need It

Sometimes being able to contact someone who knows what you are going through can provide much needed encouragement.

Our Family Contact Service can put you in touch with others who have shared a similar experience and can offer advice, support, and practical tips. You can also share your problems and solutions to everyday challenges in our closed Facebook Group for parents. The group is a friendly and safe way of discussing your worries online with other parents, sharing tips, and finding emotional support.

Remember, the [Steps](#) team are here to offer information and support in total confidence, and to answer any questions or concerns you may have. This will help you to ask informed questions at hospital appointments or may help to reassure you along the way.



No matter how big or small your concern, please telephone [Steps](#) on +44 (0) 1925 750271 or email info@steps-charity.org.uk for support and advice in total confidence.

Social media details and information about how to get in touch with the Steps Family Contact Service can be found on page 12 at the back of this booklet.

About the Pavlik Harness

What conditions require a Pavlik harness?

The Pavlik harness is primarily used to treat Developmental Dysplasia of the Hip (DDH) in infants. DDH encompasses a range of hip joint abnormalities, from mild instability to complete hip dislocations at birth. Steps have created a resource called “Baby Hip Health and DDH, a Parent’s Guide” that explores this condition in detail.

In some cases, different treatments may be recommended depending on your child’s age and the severity of the condition. You can find additional resources on the Steps website, which may help you to understand your child’s diagnosis.

What is a Pavlik harness?

A Pavlik harness is a lightweight, soft fabric harness. It has a chest strap, two shoulder straps and four leg straps that are attached to ‘stirrups’, or little ‘booties’.

It is typically used to treat babies with DDH from birth to six months of age.

The straps of the harness are adjusted and fastened to hold your baby’s hips in a safe and supported position. This position helps the hips grow and develop as well as possible.



It is important that the harness is fitted and adjusted correctly. If it is not in the right position, the hips may not be supported properly, which can affect how they develop. The harness should keep your baby’s legs bent and gently apart, as this helps the hip joint stay in the best position for growth. The harness will allow some movement of the legs but does not allow movements that could slow down healthy development of the hips.

For practical advice and Q&A with health professionals, please watch the video “Pavlik Harness treatment for developmental dysplasia of the hip, also known as DDH” on the Steps Charity YouTube channel.

How is the Pavlik harness first put on?

The Pavlik harness is fitted by a specially trained healthcare professional, usually in a hospital clinic. It will be carefully positioned around your baby’s chest, shoulders, and legs to make sure the hips are held in the correct position.

The chest and shoulder straps help keep the harness in place and are adjusted so it fits your baby snugly. The four leg straps are carefully adjusted to gently keep the hips bent and the knees apart.

Once properly fitted, you should be shown how to check the straps and care for the baby while the harness is in place. You should not need to make any adjustments to the harness. If you have any concerns with the fitting of the harness once you have gone home, you should contact your clinical team for advice, as it may need adjusting.

How long will my baby have to wear the Pavlik harness?

How long your baby needs to wear the harness will depend on how their hips are developing. Most babies wear it for 6 to 12 weeks, although some may need it for longer.

Your clinical team will check your baby’s progress regularly and let you know how long it is needed. If the harness is not helping the hips improve as expected, the team will discuss other treatment options with you.

Caring for a Baby in a Pavlik Harness

The first week may seem hard as your baby needs to adjust to the Pavlik harness. Hang in there. Your baby needs this treatment; babies are resilient and can adapt. You will also quickly work out a new routine which will get better with practice.

Will my child need any special equipment?

- You will not need any special equipment whilst your child is wearing the harness.
- Your child will be able to fit into a normal car seat and pushchair.

Is there equipment that I should avoid using?

- Baby door bouncers
- Baby walkers
- Swaddling your baby

Can I use a sling or a baby carrier?

Avoid using a sling or baby carrier while your baby is wearing the harness, unless your clinical team has told you it is safe to do so.

Your clinical team will advise you if and when it is suitable, and which options are most appropriate and safe for your baby.

Can the Pavlik harness be removed during this time?

Your baby will usually need to wear the harness all the time, including during sleep. Follow the advice from your clinical team about how long it should be worn each day. Some babies can have the harness removed for short periods, such as for bathing, but only if your clinical team has said this is safe. If you are allowed to remove it, this should be for a short time only. Your clinical team will tell how long the harness can be removed for.

If you have been shown how to remove the harness, it can be helpful to record this so you feel confident putting it back on correctly.

If you have been advised not to remove the harness, you can wash your baby using a flannel wash or a sponge bath instead.

How will I know if the Pavlik harness is working?

You will have regular appointments with your clinical team so they can check the harness and make sure it is fitting properly. Ultrasound scans are used to check how your baby's hips are developing and whether the harness is helping. In older babies, they may use X-ray imaging to check the development of the hips.

Between appointments, it is important to contact your clinical team if:

- Your baby's feet keep slipping out of the booties
- The harness feels too loose or too tight
- You notice sore areas or red marks that do not fade around the shoulders, chest, or legs
- Your baby stops moving one or both legs or feet

Nappy changes

Disposable nappies are often easier to use while your baby is in the harness.

When changing your baby, lift them gently under the bottom rather than by the legs. The nappy should always be placed under the harness. Take care not to move or loosen the straps.

If the harness becomes soiled, it can be cleaned with a mild detergent and a soft brush or cloth. Some staining is common and does not affect how the harness works.

Keeping clean and skin care



Your baby cannot have a bath whilst wearing the Pavlik harness so you will need to give them a flannel or sponge wash. Pay particular attention to the neck, shoulders, groin, and behind the knees as these can become sore. These areas need to be dried well after washing.

Try not to use cream or talc under the harness as these can clog and cause skin problems. Your clinician may be able to recommend products to help if the harness is rubbing.

Check for any red areas on the skin and, if you notice any, contact your clinical team for advice. If you are worried or concerned the skin is getting worse, please seek medical advice immediately.

Remember:

Do not remove the harness unless you've been told it's ok to do so by your clinical team.

Clothing

Loose-fitting clothing, often a size up, can be worn over the harness. Larger socks can be worn over the harness booties for warmth.

Avoid tight clothing as this can pull the legs together and affect how the harness holds the hips.

There are some retailers that make clothing specifically for DDH babies in a harness or brace. Your clinical team should be able to advise on suitable options.

The harness is usually worn directly against your baby's skin. A small amount of soft padding can be placed around the shoulder straps if there is mild skin irritation.

Some clinical teams may advise using a thin vest underneath the harness to protect the skin. The team may only advise this if the harness is able to be removed for a short period each day.

Sleeping

It can take a week or sometimes longer for your baby to get used to sleeping in the harness.

Always place your baby on their back to sleep. Do not place them on their side or front, as this is not safe for their hips or for sleep.

To keep your baby warm, you can use a baby sleeping bag in a larger size, so it fits comfortably over the harness. Loose-fitting clothing should be worn over the harness unless your clinical team advises otherwise.

Avoid swaddling or wrapping your baby tightly, as this can affect the position of the hips.

If your baby seems unsettled, check for common causes such as hunger, teething, or temperature, as it may not be related to the harness.

Play time & tummy time

Tummy time is encouraged and is important for your baby's development. You can do this on your chest or on the floor. A small, rolled towel under your baby's chest can help support them while keeping the hips in the correct position.

Your baby can also spend time playing on their back or in a supported sitting position. For older babies, floor play and using a highchair are safe with the harness.



Avoid positions where your baby's legs come together or straighten, as this can affect how the hips are held in the harness. Do not lay your baby on their side.

If your baby starts to become more active or you are unsure about any movements, speak to your clinical team for advice.

Feeding

You can continue to breastfeed while your baby is wearing the harness. You may need to try different positions and handling techniques, such as lying on your side, using an underarm hold, or using a V-shaped pillow for support. Your clinical team can help with positioning and safe handling.

It can take a little time to find a position that works for you and your baby, but most parents do.

Feeding, whether by breast or bottle, may take a little longer at first. It can also help to wind your baby more often.

If you need extra support with feeding, you can speak to your midwife, health visitor, or GP.



Car seats and pushchairs

Most babies can use their usual car seat and pushchair while wearing the harness.

Car seats can bring the legs slightly closer together, but this is usually not a problem for short journeys. Try to avoid long periods in the car seat where possible.

If you are concerned that the car seat feels tight around your baby's legs, speak to your clinical team. They can advise whether any adjustments or alternative options are needed.



Life After Your Pavlik Harness

Removal of the harness

At your clinic appointments, your clinical team will assess your baby's hips, usually with an ultrasound scan, to check how they are developing.

If the hips are stable and are developing well on the scans, the harness will be removed.

After the Pavlik harness is removed, it is normal to see some dry skin or mild redness, especially in the skin creases. This should settle within a few days. If there are any concerns, your clinical team can advise you.

Your baby will continue to have routine follow-up appointments to monitor the development of the hips as they get older.

What happens if the hips do not correct with the Pavlik harness?

Most babies respond very well to the Pavlik harness and do not need further treatment or surgery.

If the hips have not improved sufficiently in the Pavlik harness, you may be advised that more time is needed, or another type of brace may be suggested. Often the time spent in the harness is reduced especially if your baby is starting to become more active. The clinical team will advise you if this is necessary.

In some cases, when the hips do not correct or they remain dislocated despite using the Pavlik harness, you may be advised to stop using the harness completely. Your specialist clinician or consultant will explain the next steps, which may include other bracing or surgery.

If you need additional support, please reach out to the Steps team and network. We also have produced resources on 'Preparing for your child's surgery' and 'Hip surgery and spica cast care'.

What happens when treatment is successful?

Once the harness is removed, your baby may take a little time to adjust to life without the harness. They may seem unsettled, and their sleep may be disrupted for a short period.

It is normal for your baby to keep their legs in a "frog-leg" position for a few days. You can handle and care for your baby as normal.

Normal activities can be resumed but avoid using baby walkers or doorway bouncers. Activities, such as swimming, are encouraged and are great exercise as your baby grows.

Impact on the family

Preparing for your baby to be in a brace can be a very emotional time. How you respond as a family will depend on many different factors, but don't be afraid to seek help or support. Parents report feelings of guilt, anxiety, and sadness at different times during their child's treatment. All these feelings are normal and it's important to know that support is available.

Frequently asked questions about the Pavlik harness

Are there different sizes of harnesses?

Yes. There are multiple sizes of harness available to ensure the best fit for your baby and to accommodate for their growth.

Who do I contact if I have any concerns?

Always try and contact your treating clinician or team first. They should provide their contact details when you begin treatment. Alternatively, you should be able to contact the department where you had your appointment or the Paediatric Orthopaedic secretaries, for further help.

Is the Pavlik harness comfortable to wear?

Yes. Generally, they are comfortable to wear. Some babies may experience rubbing from the straps against exposed skin; if this is causing concern, talk to your clinician.

How much does a Pavlik harness weigh?

The harnesses typically weigh between 100-150g, depending on what size it is.

How long is the harness worn for?

This can vary from case to case. Typically, length of treatment is between 6 and 12 weeks, though Pavlik harnesses can be used up to 6 months of age. It is often worn 24 hours a day, but some clinicians may reduce how many hours a day baby is in the harness before it is removed completely.

Should I be concerned if my baby isn't kicking their legs or making lots of movement?

The harness will limit certain movements of the hips. However, you should see some movement of your babies legs, particularly straightening the knees (like kicking a football). If you notice little or no movement, please contact your clinician or team urgently for a review to ensure everything is progressing correctly.

Who are **Steps** and How Can They Help?

Steps is the national charity working for all those whose lives are affected by childhood lower limb conditions. Everything we do is about valuing and supporting individuals, families and carers affected by conditions which have an impact on the legs, hips or feet.

Contact **Steps** (confidential)

Call 01925 750271 with any questions you have or email info@steps-charity.org.uk.

Facebook discussion groups (private)

There are two pages for members to join:

[Steps Charity - Support Group for Parents](#)

[Steps Charity - Support Group for Adults](#)

Family contact support service (confidential)

Connecting parents (or adult caregivers) with other families who have been through something similar. Enquire via our contact number 01925 750271 or email info@steps-charity.org.uk. All our Family Contacts are interviewed and given training before they engage with a family, providing a forum for sharing ideas and consulting other parents on day-to-day questions.

Social media

Steps is active on X ([@Steps_Charity](#)), Instagram ([@StepsCharity](#)) and on YouTube ([StepsCharity](#))

Please note, external websites are not associated with Steps and Steps are not responsible for their content.

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 www.steps-charity.org.uk  StepsCharity

 @Steps_Charity  @StepsCharity

 Steps Charity Groups:
Steps Charity - Support Group for Parents
Steps Charity - Support Group for Adults

[The Leading Charity for Lower Limb Conditions](#)

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Contributors

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