

Pacifiers (soothers)

Babies are born wanting to suck. Some even suck their thumb or fingers before they are born. This is a natural behaviour that allows them to feed and grow. It's also comforting and helps babies settle.

If your baby seems to want to suck in between feedings, a pacifier can help. But it should never be used instead of feeding, and it should never be used without the extra comfort and cuddling a parent can provide.

What are the advantages of using a pacifier?

- When it's time to stop using a pacifier, you can throw it away. You can't throw away a thumb!
- Several studies suggest that using a pacifier during the first year of life decreases the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- Pacifiers may help to relieve pain during brief medical procedures.

Can there be problems with using a pacifier?

- Using a pacifier incorrectly can lead to problems with breastfeeding, teeth (cavities and overbite), and possibly ear infections.
- Homemade pacifiers, sweetened pacifiers or pacifiers tied around a baby's neck are **NOT SAFE** and could lead to injury or death.

The Do's and Don'ts of pacifiers

- It's best not to start using a pacifier until breastfeeding is going well. Talk to your doctor or lactation specialist if you feel your baby needs to use one at this early stage. One exception is for premature or sick babies in the hospital who can benefit from using one for comfort.

- Always see if your baby is hungry, tired or bored before giving them a pacifier.
- Sterilize the pacifier by putting it in boiling water for 5 minutes before the first use. Make sure it's completely cooled down before giving it to your baby. Keep it clean by washing it with hot, soapy water after each use.
- Don't "clean" the pacifier by sucking on it yourself because it can spread germs from you to your baby.
- Always check for cracks or tears before giving a pacifier to your baby. Don't give your baby a pacifier right after giving medicine, because some medicines can cause the material in the pacifier to break down. If there are cracks or tears, throw it out.
- Replace the pacifier every 2 months.
- Never dip the pacifier in sugar or honey. This will hurt your baby's teeth. Honey in children under 1 can lead to botulism, which is a type of food poisoning.
- Never tie a pacifier around your baby's neck. This can cause strangulation and death. Instead, you can use clips with short ribbons attached to them.
- Never make your own pacifier out of bottle nipples, caps or other materials. These can cause choking and death.
- Use the pacifier only when your child needs comfort. Using it all day long can affect your child's ability to learn to talk and can cause problems with teeth.
- Never let your baby or child chew on a pacifier. It could break down and cause choking and death.

Here are some tips to help your child stop using a pacifier

- Limit the time you allow your child to use a pacifier. Use it only for sleep time and comfort. Plan to give it up by 3-4 years of age to prevent dental problems. This is also the age that most children start school and need to develop other coping strategies.
- Never use punishment or humiliation to force your child to give up using a pacifier.
- Include your child by asking him to throw it away or leave it under the pillow for the "soother fairy." This is especially helpful if your child is older.

- Start a reward chart to mark your child’s progress.
- Praise your child when they give up the pacifier. Tell them you are proud that they are growing up, and give them lots of hugs and cuddles.
- Allow your child to express their feelings. If they are upset or angry, give them special cuddles to help them cope.
- If your child asks for the pacifier again (and they probably will), don’t give in. Remind them that the pacifier is gone and that they are “grown up” now.

Reviewed by the following CPS committees

- Community Paediatrics Committee

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