



## Helping your child “Quit the Habit”

Sucking is a healthy, normal behavior for very young children. Trying to stop when your child isn't ready can be frustrating for you and your child. At even three-years old, children do not understand why a habit should be stopped. Forcing the issue may make it worse. However, by age four, children can harm their mouth formation if they are still sucking their thumbs or pacifiers. Here are some tips from other parents that can help:

### **DO**

1. Reward your child's efforts to abandon the pacifier or thumb with positive reinforcement and kind words.
2. Find activities that keep the child's fingers busy as a substitute for sucking. Remember, many children suck out of boredom. Keep a "busy box" nearby which will keep little fingers busy and out of the mouth. Keep favorite finger activities in the car and near the television.

### **DON'T**

1. Do not fuss at, ridicule, or make fun of a child for sucking on the thumb or pacifier. Nagging or scolding will only make the child feel guilty. Advise caregivers, friends and relatives to ignore it.
2. If a pacifier is a problem, don't promptly withdraw its usage. Gradually wean down the daytime behavior, ending with weaning of the nighttime habit. Prompt, sudden pacifier withdrawal may promote the usage of a convenient thumb instead.

Your medical or dental professional may have additional suggestions.