



ORAL HEALTH KANSAS

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Tips and Tricks: Pacifier Use

Thumb or pacifier? Which type of non-nutritive sucking is best? This question comes up all the time. Experts prefer the use of pacifiers over thumb or finger sucking because a pacifier is less likely to cause physical problems and the habit is easier to break (the pacifier can be removed).



Potential benefits

- Reduction in the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
- Distraction in times of stress such as during shots.
- Sucking a pacifier may reduce reflux
- Helps some children get to sleep
- Helps distinguish between a hungry and a fussy baby



Use and potential health issues

- Do not allow pacifiers to be shared. This can pass bacteria that cause tooth decay and other infections.
- Avoid dipping the pacifier in sweet foods like sugar, honey, or jam. This increases the baby's risk for getting cavities.
- Never tie a pacifier to a baby's wrist, neck or crib. The string can get tangled around the baby's neck, causing choking.
- Check pacifiers for wear and tear. Pacifiers can weaken and come apart, causing a choking hazard.
- Wash a pacifier with soap and water, never your mouth. This can pass bacteria to the baby that can cause tooth decay.
- Prolonged pacifier use can cause developmental delays in swallowing and speech.



Tips to wean from a pacifier

- Limit pacifier uses to certain times (such as naptime or bedtime) or certain places (such as in bed).
- Encourage the child to throw their pacifier away because they are no longer a baby.
- Child puts pacifier under pillow for the tooth fairy to trade for small gift.
- Poke 2-3 holes in the pacifier with a clean pin, altering the pacifier so it is no longer satisfying to suck on.

For more ideas, look for our Tips & Tricks on "Kicking the Habit".