

Pacifiers (soothers): A user's guide for parents

IS IT OKAY TO USE A PACIFIER?

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 is also comforting and helps them settle.

A pacifier (or soother) can be used to satisfy a baby's need to suck. However, it should *never* be used instead of feeding, and it should *never* be used without the extra comfort and cuddling a parent can provide.

If your baby seems to want to suck in between feedings, a pacifier can help.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES?

- Sucking on a pacifier is better than a thumb or finger because it causes fewer problems with future tooth development.
- A parent can control the use of a pacifier but it's harder to control thumb sucking. When it's time to stop using a pacifier, you can throw it away. You can't throw away a thumb!
- Also, the latest medical research finds that using a pacifier may decrease the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) or crib death.

WHAT ARE THE DISADVANTAGES?

- Not using a pacifier properly 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. If you choose to use a pacifier for your baby, use it wisely and safely.

THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF PACIFIERS

- **Never** start using a pacifier until breastfeeding is fully established. Talk to your doctor or lactation specialist if you feel your baby needs to use one at this early stage. An exception is for premature or sick babies in the hospital. They may use one for comfort.
- **Never** give your baby a pacifier instead of feeding.
- **Always** see if your baby is hungry, tired or bored before giving him the pacifier. Try solving these things first.

- **Always** sterilize the pacifier by putting it in boiling water for 5 min before the first use. Make sure it's completely cooled down before giving it to your baby. Then, keep it clean by washing it with hot, soapy water after each use.
- **Always** check for cracks or tears before giving a pacifier to your baby. Sometimes, parents give their baby a pacifier right after giving a medicine (like a pain reliever, antibiotics or vitamins); some of these medicines can cause the material in the pacifier to break down. If there are cracks or tears, throw it out. Replace the pacifier every two months, before damage occurs.
- **Never** dip the pacifier in sugar or honey. This will damage the teeth. Honey can lead to botulism, which is a type of food poisoning.
- **Never** tie a pacifier around a baby's neck. This can cause strangulation and death. Instead, you can use clips with short ribbons attached to them. These are available where you buy pacifiers and are safe to use.
- **Never** make your own pacifier out of bottle nipples, caps or other materials. These can cause choking and death.
- **Never** let your older child crawl or walk around with a pacifier all day long. This may interfere with speech development and may cause problems with their teeth.
- **Never** let your baby or child chew on a pacifier. It could break down and cause choking and death.

TIPS ON GETTING YOUR CHILD TO STOP USING A PACIFIER

- Limit the time you allow your child to use a pacifier. Use it only for sleep time and comfort until about 12 months old and then plan to give it up.
- Never use punishment or humiliation to force your child to give up using a pacifier.
- Involve your child in the decision to stop using it by giving him the choice of throwing it away, putting it away or leaving it under the pillow for the 'tooth fairy'.
- Start a reward chart to mark your child's progress.
- Praise your child when your child has given up the pacifier and tell her you are proud that she is growing up.
- Allow your child to express his feelings and if your child is upset or angry, give him special cuddles to help him cope.
- If your child asks for the pacifier again (and she probably will), don't give in. Remind her that the pacifier is gone and that she is grown up now.

Footnotes

This information should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your physician. There may be variations in treatment that your physician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.