

Thumb, Finger, & Pacifier Habits

Sucking on a thumb, finger, or pacifier is a natural reflex for a baby. Sucking can help an infant feel happy and more secure, and it can also help young children soothe themselves to fall asleep.

Are sucking habits harmful for my child's teeth?

Most children stop sucking on thumbs, fingers, or pacifiers on their own between the ages of 2 and 4 years, and no harm is done to their teeth or jaws. If a child continues the sucking habit after the permanent teeth come in, there may be bite problems or the child can have crowded, crooked teeth. Pacifiers can affect the teeth the same way as sucking fingers or thumbs. However, the pacifier habit is often easier to break.



What are some tips when using pacifiers?

- DO use a pacifier with a plastic shield that is wider than your child's mouth.
- DO use a pacifier with ventilation holes.
- Do NOT tie a pacifier around your child's neck.
- Do NOT dip a pacifier in sugar or sweet liquids. This can increase your child's risk for tooth decay.
- Do NOT clean a pacifier in your mouth before giving it to your child. This can pass cavity-causing germs to your child.

What can I do to stop my child's habit?

Encouraging your child to stop the habit should begin by age 3, so that the sucking will have stopped entirely by age 4. Some tips to help encourage your child to stop the habit are:

- Praise your child for not sucking instead of scolding them when they are.
- Children often want to suck when feeling insecure or needing comfort. Try to find the cause of the anxiety and provide comfort for your child.
- Involve your child in choosing the method of stopping.
- Remind your child of the habit by wrapping the thumb or finger or putting a sock on their hand at night.
- Visit your dentist for help. The dentist can encourage your child and explain what could happen to their teeth if they do not stop sucking.