

Babies, pacifiers & thumb sucking

Many babies use pacifiers or their fingers to soothe themselves. But which is best and when should they stop?



THE THUMB AND FINGER HABIT

Many babies will suck on a favorite thumb or finger. This is normal. There are some good things about this habit:

- You don't have to buy a pacifier. And, you don't have to worry about it falling on the floor and getting dirty.
- A baby always has it when they need it.

There are some downsides to this habit, including:

- Babies may touch things and get germs on their hands. Then, these germs get in their mouth.
- Thumb sucking may increase the risk of ear infections.
- You can't take it away when you want them to quit the habit!

USING A PACIFIER

Many babies get pacifiers right after birth and use them for months or years. They can be helpful because they:

- Can reduce pain during shots or blood draws.
- They may reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- You can take them away when you want them to stop using it.

Pacifiers aren't always good. They can:

- Cause problems with breastfeeding.
- Get lost or fall on a dirty floor or surface.
- Increase the risk of ear infections.
- Cause dental problems with long-term use (longer than 6 months).

YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS

Many parents find that they need to allow their baby to soothe with fingers or a pacifier. Without it, their baby may be fussy or may not sleep well. Keep these things in mind when weighing the pros and cons:

- It's best to use pacifiers in babies under 6 months. After 1 year of age, babies should start to wean off the pacifier.
- Don't put honey or anything else on a pacifier. Wash it often and especially after it touches the floor or dirty objects.
- Thumb and finger sucking can be hard to stop. If your child doesn't stop by age 4, talk to their doctor.

If you have questions about pacifier use or thumb sucking, talk to your child's pediatrician.



Source: American Academy of Family Physicians