

Comfort sucking

Sucking is a baby's first instinct and is strongest in the first 12 months then gradually eases. Eventually, they will grow out of the habit, or stop with your encouragement.

Comfort sucking

- Your child may develop a habit of sucking things such as a dummy (pacifier), their fingers, thumb or other things like a blanket, bottle, toy or clothing for comfort.
- These sucking habits in a *very young* child are usually not a concern.

However, if the habit is **regular** and **prolonged**, and continues **after 4 years** of age, it can cause the front teeth and the surrounding bone to be pushed out of position. Also speech problems may occur, especially with the 's' and 'th' sounds.



Did you know?

- It is best **not** to use a dummy while you are establishing breastfeeding as your baby needs to do plenty of sucking at the breast.
- Dummies may increase the risk of ear infection.
- Some children use their bottle as a comforter. If so, make sure that there is only water in the bottle between feeds; **continually sucking milk or juice can damage teeth**
- Avoid cleaning your child's dummy in your mouth as this may transfer decay causing bacteria (germs) from your mouth to your child's mouth. Never allow children to share a dummy.



Clean and sterilise baby's dummy daily and keep in a container when not in use. Keep a spare dummy for use when cleaning a dropped dummy is not possible.



Never dip dummies in anything sweet e.g. honey, jam, condensed milk and vitamin C syrups as this can lead to tooth decay

Tips for changing sucking habits

Gentle encouragement for your child to give up the habit is a good start. At around 2½ to 3 years of age, your child may be more prepared to break the habit. Set a date to stop, such as your child's third birthday. Talk to your child about this, and together, work towards reducing the time they have a dummy or suck their thumb/finger. Some ideas to try include:

- Only give a dummy at sleep time, take the thumb/finger or dummy out once child is asleep
- Discourage your child from walking around with anything in their mouth
- Offer your child a reward once it has been achieved. Encourage with hugs and praise
- The use of a sticky plaster on the thumb or finger, or a glove or sock on your child's hand may act as a reminder and barrier to help stop thumb or finger sucking

If your child's sucking habit persists, seek advice from your dental practitioner

Would you like more information or to provide feedback?

This document can be made available in alternative formats such as braille, audio tape or electronically on request.



Communications Officer, Dental Health Services
Locked Bag 15, Bentley Delivery Centre, WA 6983



(08) 9313 0555



publications@dental.health.wa.gov.au



www.dental.wa.gov.au



© 2019 Dental Health Services WA. All rights reserved.