

Thumbs, Fingers, and Pacifiers

WHY DO CHILDREN SUCK ON THUMBS, FINGERS, and PACIFIERS?

Thumbs, finger or pacifier sucking is normal for young children and babies. Most of these habits are a common occurrence at some time in their early life and help provide security.

A pacifier should not, however, be used to replace or delay feedings. Offer a pacifier only after or between feedings. **Never tie a pacifier around your baby's neck or hand, or to your child's crib. This is very dangerous and could result in serious injury.**

HOW AND WHEN TO STOP

As children grow and develop, their need to suck usually goes away and most children will stop sucking on their own. By the time they are 5-6 years old, children often succumb to peer pressure and are better able to control their behavior generally resulting in cessation of the habit. The only cause for concern is if the habit continues as the permanent teeth are erupting, and affects the shape of your child's mouth or teeth.

As a first step in dealing with your child's sucking habits, stay positive. As mentioned, most often they will disappear with time. Harsh words, teasing, or punishment may upset your child and the habit may get worse. A book that we often recommend to help you and your child through this is called "David Decides."

Older children (3 years and above) may use sucking to relieve boredom. Try getting your child's attention with an activity that they find fun. Rewarding good behavior is the best way to produce change. Praise and reward your child when he or she doesn't use the pacifier or suck their thumb. Star charts, daily rewards, and gentle reminders are very helpful. Your child should be directly involved in the treatment chosen. If these approaches don't work, consult with your pediatric dentist. Sometimes it is necessary to intervene with the placement of a mouth appliance that blocks sucking habits. If you have further questions, please feel free to ask Dr. Donley about your child's habit.

*Based on information from the American Academy of Pediatrics and Pediatric Dentistry



(978) 443-8833

Book suggestions for helping with thumb sucking

(You can find these either at the Goodnow Library in Sudbury, or on Amazon.com)

1. David Decides about Thumb Sucking
By: Susan Heitler
2. Little Thumb
By: Wanda Dionne
3. Harold's Hideaway Thumb
By: Sonnenschein