

Dummies, Soothers and Pacifiers and your Baby



The desire for babies to suck is perfectly natural. Dummies were designed as a substitute breast for those babies who could not breastfeed, to help them get comfort and security from sucking. As such, a pacifier may be helpful for a bottle fed baby once feeding is established as it can provide comfort sucking that a breastfed baby receives at the breast.

Babies breastfeed for comfort and security, in addition to nutrition. By breastfeeding your baby as frequently as they want then it is unlikely they will need a dummy as their sucking needs will be met through the time they spend at the breast.

How might using a dummy affect my baby and I?

For both breastfed and bottle fed babies:

- When a baby displays feeding cues (such as being restless and sucking their hand) they are prompting their parent to feed them. Using a dummy may 'mask' feeding cues, thus reducing the number and/or frequency of feeds. For all babies, no matter how they are fed, this may lead to weight loss, static or slow growth. For breastfeeding parents, this may lead to a reduction in milk supply.
- Dummy use may impact on the formation of the mouth, particularly the teeth, and this could affect biting and chewing food.
- Higher risk of tooth decay
- Dummy use increases a child's risk of middle ear infections, tummy infections, chest infections and thrush in the mouth.
- Your baby may become dependent on a dummy for comfort and may resist giving it up.
- Language delays if constantly used during wakeful times
- Some studies on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS, sometimes called "Cot Death") suggest that dummy use is protective when used *consistently* for each sleep (day and night). However the data is limited. As such, the UK Department of Health does not currently recommend dummy use as a way of reducing the risk of SIDS.
- If a baby is used to sleeping with a dummy and then does not use one on a particular occasion then they are at *greater* risk of SIDS. Breastfeeding itself is protective against SIDS, and babies who have never been given a dummy are not at greater risk.



For breastfed babies:

There is controversy about whether it is harmful to breastfeeding to use artificial teats and dummies. In addition to the above, here are some issues to consider:

- The different technique used to suck on a dummy *may* make it more difficult for babies to breastfeed whilst they are still learning.
- Early dummy use has been shown to impact overall length of time a mother exclusively breastfeeds (and therefore the health protection benefits for mother and baby).
- If using a dummy is causing breastfeeds to be spaced out more than is needed then your fertility may return sooner.

If you decide to use a dummy:

- A dummy should only be used when settling a baby to sleep and should be used consistently.
- Phase out the use of a dummy between 6 -12 months.
- Wash and sterilise regularly to avoid infection.
- Do not tie anything to the dummy.
- If you are breastfeeding, establish your feeding relationship and milk supply first (this may take about 4 weeks) before you consider a dummy. A contented baby that feeds well may not want a dummy and should not be encouraged to accept one.

If you would like to discuss this issue more please talk to your midwife or health care professional.

