

## Patient information leaflet for use in maternity services: Dummies, Soothers, 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 opportunities that a breastfed baby will receive at the breast.

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

### 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 if used for longer than 6-12 months.
- Dummy use may result in a higher risk of tooth decay. You shouldn't put anything sweet on your baby's dummy.
- 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.
- Dummy use may cause language delays if regularly used during times when baby is awake.
- Some studies on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) suggest that dummy use is protective when offered *consistently* for each sleep (day and night). Do not force your baby to take the dummy if they do not want it. If your baby spits the dummy out during their sleep, there is no need to keep putting it back in.



*For breastfed babies:*

If you choose to use a dummy, only introduce it once you have established breastfeeding. The time this takes differs for each person, but it could be a few weeks. Make sure you get help if you need it. Once breastfeeding is established, introducing a dummy should not have a negative effect.

*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 use a neck cord or dummy attachments.
- If you are breastfeeding, establish your feeding relationship and milk supply first (this may take a few 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.

*What if my baby won't take a dummy?*

Not all babies like using dummies. If your baby repeatedly refuses a dummy, do not force them to take it. Following other safer sleep advice such as not smoking and placing your baby to sleep on their back will still significantly lower their chance of SIDS.

For more information about dummy use and SIDS, please look at Basis Online and the Lullaby Trust:

[Dummies - \(basisonline.org.uk\)](https://www.basisonline.org.uk)

[7-dummy-factsheet-2020.pdf \(lullabytrust.org.uk\)](https://www.lullabytrust.org.uk/7-dummy-factsheet-2020.pdf)

