

THUMBS & PACIFIERS

Toddlers (ages 1-2)

Most toddlers naturally give up their thumb-sucking or pacifier habit by the time they're two years of age. If your toddler hasn't kicked the habit by then, you'll want to encourage him to do so as soon as possible in order to prevent orthodontic problems down the road. A recent study at the University of Iowa College of Dentistry and the Tokyo Dental College found that sucking a thumb, finger, or pacifier beyond age two increases the likelihood that a child will develop overhanging (protruding) front teeth or a crossbite (a narrowing of the upperjaw relative to the lower jaw).

To discourage your toddler from sucking his thumb, try to come up with creative ways of keeping his hands busy at those times of day when his thumb tends to find its way into his mouth. If, for example, your toddler is in the habit of sucking his thumb while you read him a bedtime story, give him two small toys to hold onto—one for each hand. This approach tends to be more effective than putting a bandage or a bitter substance on your child's thumb or constantly nagging him about his behaviour—strategies that can actually backfire by reinforcing the thumbsucking behaviour.

To discourage your toddler from turning to his pacifier each time he's upset (which, by the way, prevents him from learning other methods of managing his emotions), make an effort to keep the pacifier out of sight and your toddler's mind on other things. Some parents keep the pacifier in their toddler's room so that he has to go and retrieve it if he wants it. Others limit pacifier use to nighttime only.

You'll probably find that your toddler's pacifier use will decrease as he starts to develop other ways of comforting



himself when he's upset, when he's able to communicate more effectively, and when he notices that other children his age no longer have pacifiers.

A gradual process of weaning a child off his pacifier generally works best. Forcing a child to give up his pacifier before he's ready can actually cause him to become more dependent on it than ever.

Here's another other important point to consider: excessive pacifier use can interfere with your toddler's speech. Not only will he have fewer opportunities to practise his speech, but overuse of a pacifier can also interfere with his articulation skills. He may tend to replace his "t" and "d" sounds (which require that the front of the tongue brush up against the back of the front teeth) with "k" and "g" sounds (sounds produced at the back of the throat). The solution? Let your toddler know that you can't understand what he's saying when he tries talking with his pacifier in his mouth. Over time, he'll learn to take the pacifier out of his mouth while he's speaking.

<http://www.canadianparents.com/article/thumbs-and-pacifiers>



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