

Parents' Guide on Using Dummies & Bottles



THIS LEAFLET CONTAINS INFORMATION ABOUT:

- **Using a dummy in the early days/weeks**
- **Types of dummies**
- **Safe dummy use**
- **Risks of dummy use**
- **How you can reduce the risks**
- **Tips to help ditch the dummy**
- **Using bottles**

DECIDING TO USE A DUMMY

Using a dummy for your child is a personal choice you make as a parent. If you are breastfeeding and decide to use a dummy it is recommended that you consider waiting until breastfeeding is established, this can take up to 6 weeks. Dummy use before this can cause your baby to have a shallower latch at the breast and interfere with your milk production.

Whether you are breast or bottle feeding you will be encouraged to feed your baby in response to their feeding cues or signals that they are hungry. Crying is normal, and one way your baby communicates with you. When your baby cries try to think about what they need and try some other ways to comfort them, using the dummy as a last resort.

Other ways to comfort your baby at this time:

- Skin contact with your baby in the early days and beyond will encourage healthy brain development
- Holding your baby close – when babies have lots of cuddles and love, you both release a hormone called oxytocin. This helps you both feel calm and happy and makes baby feel safe and secure - you can't spoil a baby with too many cuddles
- Rocking, swaying, singing, talking and massaging your baby

DUMMY USE FOR PREMATURE BABIES

An orthodontic dummy is sometimes recommended by a health professional if your baby is born prematurely. This helps establish sucking skills required for breast or bottle feeding.

DUMMY USE AND SLEEP

There are some studies that suggest using a dummy MIGHT reduce the chance of sudden infant death, however, the reasons for this are not clear. There is currently a lack of researched-based information available to support this. If you choose to use a dummy it is recommended that you offer it consistently at the beginning of every sleep both day and night. If the dummy falls out during baby's sleep there is no need to keep putting it back in.

SAFE DUMMY USE

All dummies need to be made of latex, be BPA-free, sized and shaped for your baby's mouth - always check the advised age range, leave your baby's nose free, be taste-free and odourless. It's best to use a dummy approved by the British Dental Health Foundation to ensure you purchase a safe and certified product.

- NEVER use a dummy with a neck cord or other attachments as this may lead to choking or strangulation hazard
- Do not force your baby to take a dummy or put it back in if your baby spits it out
- Do not put anything sweet on it e.g. juice
- Do not 'clean' it by putting it in your mouth
- Keep it as clean as possible by regularly sterilising as you would any other bottle or feeding teat
- Check it regularly as splits and holes can trap germs

Due to the risks associated with dummy use it is recommended that you stop giving a dummy to your baby between 6 and 12 months



DUMMY USE CAN CAUSE

- Stomach and mouth infections
- Middle ear infections or “glue ear”
- Poor teeth development, even into adulthood such as open bite and cross bite
- Increased dribbling - as they find it harder to put their lips together to swallow
- Difficulties with their eating
- Reduced babbling and experimentation with sounds - slowing down how quickly they learn to talk

HOW YOU CAN REDUCE THE RISKS

- If you use a dummy, use it at set times like bedtime
- Keep dummies just for comfort i.e. when your baby is tired or upset
- Reduce the amount of time they have a dummy from around six months
- Wait for your child to ask for the dummy with gestures or looking at it before you give it to them rather than putting it in their mouth automatically

DUMMY USE AFTER 12 MONTHS HAS NO BENEFITS AND IT'S HARDER TO WEAN OFF THE OLDER YOUR CHILD BECOMES!

SOME HINTS TO HELP DITCH THE DUMMY

It can be difficult to wean your child off their dummy but here are some ideas on how to help with the process:

- Restrict use to night time only, taking the dummy out once your child has fallen asleep
- If the dummy is used during the day, start by removing it for short periods of time when your child is doing something they enjoy e.g. playing or looking at books
- Swap the dummy with another source of comfort e.g. a soft cuddly toy. Recognise that giving up their dummy may be hard for your child. Name their feelings e.g. 'I know you want your dummy, let's try having a cuddle / holding your bear instead'
- Use star charts or a small reward for each day and a bigger reward at the end of the week (NOT sweets!)
- You might like to plan with your child how they can stop using their dummy, for example by leaving it for the dummy fairy or putting it in the bin together
- If your child attends an early years setting or childminder, it can be useful to work together to reduce dummy use
- Do not try to remove the dummy whilst your child is experiencing other changes e.g. a new sibling, starting nursery etc

Contact your local Family Hub, children's centre or health visitor, or discuss with your child's early years setting for further ideas and support.

USING BOTTLES

Comfort sucking from a bottle on sweetened drinks causes tooth decay in young children. Drinks flow very slowly through a teat, which means the sugary substance will be in contact with their teeth for longer. The action of sucking on a teat has the same risks as using a dummy.

Do not put anything other than breastmilk, formula milk or water in a bottle or cup and do not add anything else (including sugar, cereals, baby rice or chocolate powder) to the feed.

At around 6 months of age introduce your baby to drinking from a cup or beaker, offering sips of water with meals. Use an open cup or a free-flow cup without a valve as this will help your baby learn to sip and is better for your baby's teeth.

Once your baby is 1 year old, feeding from a bottle should be discouraged.

USEFUL RESOURCES

The following websites have further information for parents and staff:

- Literacy Trust
www.literacytrust.org.uk/talktoyourbaby
- Talking Point www.talkingpoint.org.uk
- Help your baby learn to talk - [NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)
- Drinks & cups for babies and young children - [NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)
- <https://www.lullabytrust.org.uk/safer-sleep-advice/dummies-and-sids/>