

AS SEEN IN

By Dr. Glenn V. Hemberger

It seems there is never a shortage of advice in raising your baby and the use of a pacifier is no exception. The advice, however, often varies wildly when the questions are asked: When

Pacifier

Use it or lose it?



should I give my baby the pacifier? When and how should I wean? Are there any ill-effects? Is it necessary at all?

Most experts agree that babies do have a real need for sucking and the pacifier's use does fulfill this desire. The pacifier may, in some cases, even replace the thumb in non-nutritive sucking and is certainly more easily controlled. The key word, however, is controlled.

A pacifier should never be forced on a child just because of crying. The baby's crying could well be unrelated to their need to suck.

Your child should not be allowed to have the pacifier at all times during the day. The emphasis, again, is to control the use of the pacifier and mainly limit it to bedtime.

When your child begins to crawl, the weaning process should already begin. By 12-16 months of age, total weaning should have taken place. Prolonged use of the pacifier (past 16 months of age) can have several ill-effects on the teeth.

The baby's front teeth position is altered to where they cannot function

when biting off food. The back teeth are also affected causing the upper teeth and palate to become too narrow to bite properly with the lower teeth. While some of these dental problems may eventually self-correct when the pacifier is no longer used, frequently they will continue resulting in the need for early and extra orthodontic correction.

Prolonged pacifier use can also contribute to lisping during speech development and difficulty in proper swallowing of solid foods. This is due to an anterior tongue posture often known as "tongue thrust." In most cases, improvement in both speech and swallowing will occur when the pacifier's use is totally discontinued. The sooner its use is curtailed, the more quickly will be the improvement.

The weaning process is difficult for some parents. Although immediate curtailment of the pacifier works well for children with a mild propensity, others present more of a challenge. A child's desire for the pacifier can be lessened quickly if the parents place small holes in the nipple. The main ingredient in a quick and successful weaning process is the resolve the parent presents. Your child will quickly pick up on this and will give you considerably less of a challenge. A small child can not be expected to make this decision on their own.

In conclusion, the pacifier is recommended to help satisfy your baby's need for sucking but parents must be in control of its use.

Dr. Glenn V. Hemberger, D.D.S., M.S. specializes in dental care from baby's first check-up (12-18 months) to preventative care. He also provides orthodontic care.

