



What you should know about pacifiers

“Non-nutritive sucking” is a biological need for babies when they are tired, hungry, bored or uncomfortable. In fact, fetuses start to suck in utero in the first trimester. This behavior is hardwired – a built-in reflex controlled by the brain stem at first and coming under more conscious control in the first few months of life. Not only do pacifiers soothe and regulate babies, research has shown that using them at nap and nighttime decreases the risk of SIDS during the first six months of life. Most children have less of a need to suck as they get older.

When should your child use a pacifier?

Many children suck on a pacifier when they're upset. However, examine your own reactions as a parent when your child is upset. Do you find yourself reaching for a pacifier instead of reaching for your child? Some would say “Pacifiers exist to sooth the parent, not a child.” Some parents to avert the tantrum sure to erupt when a child is denied a Blow Pop or M & M's, hasn't endured the disapproving glances of well-meaning strangers? Above all, always try other ways of comforting your child. Teach your child other self-soothing techniques (aside from thumb sucking, of course!) When your child is upset or anxious, distract your child with a fun play activity or give him/her a cuddly animal or other transitional object to help him/her make the switch from the pacifier to a more suitable soother.

It is recommended that pacifier use be confined to the crib. Children can then use it when they want to settle down and go to sleep.

Why wean your child from a pacifier?

Possible side effects of prolonged pacifier use include:

- **Tooth Misalignment:** Depending on how long your child sucks on his/her pacifier, she/he could end up with a small deformity in the upper jaw, which could cause his/her upper teeth to misalign.
- **Slowed Language Development:** With a pacifier stuck in your baby's mouth all the time, she is less likely to babble and experiment with sound. This lack of practice could lead to slow language development.
- **Increased ear Infections:** Pediatricians say that pacifier use has caused a 50% rise in ear infections.

When to wean off a pacifier

My recommendation for weaning is between 10-12 months. While at Almost Mom any child that uses a pacifier will be given the pacifier during nap time and upon waking the pacifier will be left in their pack-n-play. Another reason to begin weaning at this time is when your child transitions from two naps a day, down to one nap sometime between 12-18 months, your child will graduate to sleeping on a cot and will no longer be given a pacifier.

How to wean a child from a pacifier

This can be a natural and gradual process. Most children between the ages of 10-12 months begin throwing their pacifiers out of their beds. At this point DO NOT go in and give the pacifier back to them. Your child at this point will begin to learn how to fall asleep on their own.

Mostly importantly BE CONSISTENT! Do not give in to your child through tantrum or bedtime crying. If you eventually give in and give your child the pacifier, he /she will become confused. Stick to your guns and he/she will come around quicker than you think. In fact, we as parents are quick to believe that our children are not as resilient as they actually are. We think they will crumble if any part of their perfectly routine day is out of whack. Nothing could be further from the truth. Sometimes it's harder for us the parent than it is for our children.

The first day it may take a good hour for your child to fall asleep, because he/she doesn't know how to sleep without the pacifier. Be prepared for tears and screams, but don't scold him/her, just support him/her as they work through this. Give this a try for 7-10 days and your child will have learned how to fall asleep on their own. The one thing you have to make sure of is that you don't substitute yourself as the new "object" that he/she needs in order to fall asleep.

At Almost Mom we believe that patience is a virtue, always set a child up to succeed not to fail, and we have all the time in the world to learn. We are always here to support, listen, and problem solve with any parent anytime.