



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Health

Brush Up on Oral Health

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Did You Know?

- Sucking is one of a baby's natural reflexes. Many babies begin to suck on their fingers or thumbs before they are born.
- It is easier to wean a child from a pacifier than it is to wean a child from sucking his or her fingers or thumbs.



Non-Nutritive Sucking and Pacifiers

Babies suck so they can eat and grow. Non-nutritive sucking (sucking on something other than a breast or a bottle nipple) is normal for babies. Giving a baby a pacifier satisfies the need to suck and can help calm the baby.

Between ages 2 and 4, most children stop using a pacifier on their own. If a child continues to use a pacifier after age 5, it can affect the way his or her teeth bite together. For example, it can cause an overbite. It can also affect the growth of jaws and bones that support the child's teeth.

This issue offers tips Head Start staff can share with parents about using pacifiers safely and weaning their child from a pacifier. It also provides a recipe for a healthy snack that can be made in a Head Start classroom or at home.

Tips to Share with Parents About Using a Pacifier Safely

If parents choose to give their baby a pacifier, here are some tips for using the pacifier safely:

- **Wait until breastfeeding is going well (usually after about 3 to 4 weeks).** If a pacifier is given to a baby before then, it can make establishing breastfeeding harder. After a pacifier is introduced, it should never be used to delay or replace regular feedings.
- **Let a baby decide whether to use a pacifier.** If a baby shows no interest in using a pacifier, do not force it. The baby may not need a pacifier.

- **Before using a pacifier to help soothe a baby, try other things.** When a baby is upset or uncomfortable, try holding, rocking, snuggling, or singing to calm the baby. A pacifier can be tried if these ideas don't work.
- **Offer a pacifier at naptime and bedtime.** If a baby uses a pacifier, the best time to offer it is at naptime and bedtime. Using a pacifier at these times reduces a baby's risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.
- **Buy pacifiers; do not make them.** Taping a nipple to a plastic bottle top or using an empty bottle with a nipple is not safe. Homemade pacifiers can come apart. A loose nipple can get caught in a baby's throat and make the baby choke.
- **Use pacifiers that are not coated.** Do not coat a pacifier with anything, especially sugar, honey, or jam. Doing this puts a baby at high risk for tooth decay.
- **Use clips with short ribbons attached to them to keep pacifiers from falling.** Never tie a pacifier to a baby's wrist or neck or to a baby's crib. The string can get tangled around the baby's neck and make the baby choke.
- **Clean pacifiers and replace them regularly.** Use soap and warm water before giving a pacifier that has fallen on the ground or floor back to a baby. Parents who clean pacifiers with their mouths pass bacteria that cause tooth decay to the baby. This puts the baby at high risk for tooth decay. Carrying extra pacifiers is a good idea.
- **Avoid pacifier sharing.** Just like toothbrushes, each baby should have his or her own pacifier(s). Letting babies share a pacifier can pass bacteria and viruses that cause sickness and increase a baby's risk for tooth decay.

Tips to Help Parents Wean Their Child from a Pacifier

If a child shows no interest in self-weaning from the pacifier by age 3, parents may need to help. Here are some ideas to share with parents.

- **Give it away.** Encouraging the child to give his or her pacifier to a newborn baby often works. Some parents go so far as to gift wrap all the child's pacifiers and take them to the doctor's office to give newborn babies. If the child asks for a pacifier, parents can remind him or her that a baby now has all the pacifiers. It is always a good idea to call the doctor's office before the child's appointment to ask the staff to accept the used pacifiers and throw them out after the child has left the office.



- **Trade it.** Encourage the child to put pacifiers under the pillow for the "pacifier fairy," who will trade them for a gift, like a wanted toy or something soothing. If the child keeps asking for the pacifier, remind the child that it was given to the "pacifier fairy," who gave the child a gift. Parents have also used Santa, the Easter Bunny, or other positive cultural characters.

- **Take it away gradually.** Limiting pacifier use to certain times (such as naptime or bedtime) or to certain places (such as in bed) is a good first step. In most cases, when a child uses a pacifier in bed, it falls out of the child's mouth during sleep. Parents can gradually increase the amount of time the child is not using a pacifier until the child stops.

Cook's Corner: Frozen Yogurt-Covered Blueberries

Here is a delicious healthy snack that children can make in a Head Start classroom or at home with their families.

Ingredients

One 8 oz. package of fresh or frozen blueberries

One 6 oz. container of yogurt

Directions

1. Line a cookie sheet with waxed paper.
2. Push a toothpick in a blueberry and dip the blueberry into yogurt until it is covered.
3. Put the yogurt-covered blueberry onto the waxed-paper-covered cookie sheet. Repeat this step until the cookie sheet is full.
4. Put the blueberry-filled cookie sheet in the freezer for 1 hour or until the blueberries are completely frozen.



Safety Tip: An adult should supervise children's use of toothpicks.

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