

Thumbsucking and dummies

This factsheet is one of a collection developed for the Happy Teeth program.

Thumbsucking, or the use of a dummy by a baby, is little cause for concern before permanent teeth appear. If the habit persists after permanent teeth appear, the thumb and dummy may force the teeth and jaw out of alignment. This may then need correction by a dental specialist.

If you use a dummy

- Do not add flavouring
- Check dummy regularly for rips and tears and replace it if these are found.
- Keeping dummies clean. Dummies are frequently dropped, so always carry a spare. Before using it again, the dirty dummy should be placed in a sterilising solution to kill any bacteria. If you do not have a spare one, wash the dummy with running water.
- Do not suck the child's dummy, as this will transfer bacteria from your mouth to the child's.
- Never allow children to share a dummy.

Suggestions for changing habits

- Only give the child a dummy at sleep time.
- Remove the dummy once the child is asleep.
- Discourage your child from walking around with the dummy or thumb in his or her mouth.
- If the child still has a dummy or thumbsucking habit at around four years of age, make a date by which the child will have given up the habit eg, the child's fourth birthday. Talk to the child about giving it up and work towards reducing the time the child has the dummy or sucks their thumb. By the fourth birthday, the child may be prepared to stop the habit.
- If your child's sucking habit causes you concern, discuss methods of breaking the habit with your local dental professional.

Remember

- Never add flavouring
- Discard the dummy as early as possible
- The habit of thumbsucking should be discouraged and stopped before permanent teeth appear in the mouth.

Reference

Adapted from Thumbsucking and Dummies. Health Department of Western Australia February 1993.