

Dummies and learning to talk

Why do we give our babies a dummy?

Because:

- They want a soother
- It helps quieten them
- He/she is used to it
- Habit - I didn't want him/her to have it for this long but I can't get it off him/her

As babies get older they need to learn to move their mouths in different ways, to smile, to blow bubbles, to make sounds, to chew food and eventually to talk. As babies move their mouths and experiment with babbling sounds they are learning to make the quick mouth movements needed for speech. The more practice they get the better their awareness of their mouths and the better their speech will be.

Golden rules

1. Don't let a dummy become a habit.
2. Dummies and bottles are not suitable for breast fed babies until feeding is established.
3. Use it at set times - when cross & tired or settling down to sleep.
4. Never dip a dummy in drinks, honey, jam, etc - this leads to teeth becoming rotten and decayed.
5. Wait until your child needs the dummy rather than automatically giving it to them.
6. Wean your baby off the dummy as soon as you can, preferably by 12 months old. It is much easier then than at 2-3 years old!
7. Speech and language therapists recommend that children over 12 months old do not use a dummy/bottles.

Potential dummy problems

Using a dummy too much can lead to some problems.

- It can lead to the incorrect positioning of teeth so that the bottom and top teeth at the front don't meet properly.
- Encourage tooth decay (especially the front teeth) if the dummy is dipped into sweet things

Speech and language problems:

- your child may not use the full range of tongue movements that are necessary for making all the speech sound

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- your child has fewer opportunities to babble and use sounds to communicate with you

Mouth breathing - your child may tend to breathe through their mouth rather than their nose. This is often linked to long-term dribbling

How do you get rid of a dummy?

Aim to get rid of the dummy/bottle around 12 months or sooner.

- Wean them off it by gradually decreasing its use.
- Only give them the dummy at certain times - bedtime or when they are not well.
- Persuade them to give (all) their dummies to their nursery teacher.
- Swap the dummy/bottle for a gift/cuddly toy/new toothbrush.
- Remove the dummy/bottle when your child is trying to talk.
- Get the child to throw the dummy/bottle in the bin.
- Praise your child if s/he will give up the dummy/bottle.
- Choose the right time to give up - not when you are under pressure.
- Try cuddling or reading to your child before bedtime instead of giving the dummy/bottle.
- Use a star chart to motivate them.

Things parents have told us about stopping the dummy:

- It wasn't as bad as I thought, I just decided it had to go.
- He has started talking now so we have gotten rid of the dummy.
- After a couple of nights he stopped asking for the dummy.

Originally created for Talk to your Baby. Adapted from advice and guidance created by Brighton & Hove Sure Start (Copyright South Downs Health NHS Trust) and Northern Lincolnshire and Goole Hospitals NHS Trust.