

Thumbsucking, Fingersucking, and Pacifier Use

Is it harmful?

What happens if it doesn't stop?

When should it stop?



Why do children suck on things?

Initially, sucking is a natural reflex for babies.

They do this before they are even born to prepare for the future.

Newborns need to suck to get nutrition.

As children get older it can help them explore their world.

It can provide a feeling of security.

It is relaxing and can induce sleep.

They may suck when they are tired as an instinctive response.

Problems associated with prolonged thumb, finger, and pacifier sucking:

If prolonged, it can change the alignment of teeth and the roof of the mouth.

With increased intensity the problems can increase at a faster rate.

When should it stop?

Most children stop on their own between the ages of two and four years old.

Peer pressure can cause school aged children to stop

This habit should be discouraged after age four

How to break the habit:

- 1) Offer praise for not sucking as opposed to focusing on the negatives
- 2) Work on the insecurities that cause the behavior
- 3) Reward when they avoid sucking at a difficult time, (being away from you)
- 4) Your dentist can encourage children to stop & explain the potential effects.
- 5) You can remind them by using a wrapping cloth bandage or sock at night

Adapted from information from the American Dental Association www.ada.org

