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# Pacifiers and Oral Health

Pacifiers can be great for children, especially during their first six months. In addition to its calming effect, pacifier use in infants can help decrease the risk of sudden infant death syndrome and aid in the development of jaw muscles. Although pacifier use is generally a healthy habit within the first two years of life, continued or improper use may ultimately have a negative impact on your child's oral and overall health.

## Potential pacifier problems

Pacifier use typically is acceptable after an infant is 1 month old and has had sufficient time to develop a healthy breast-feeding habit. However, experts recommend that children stop using pacifiers after age 2, when it becomes more of a habit than a developmental need. Research shows that continued pacifier use, especially after age 2, often is associated with:

- Increased risk of middle ear infection.
- Improper growth of the mouth.
- Misalignment of teeth.
- Dental crossbite and/or open bite.
- Development of a thumb-sucking habit.

Parents should aim to rid children of their pacifier habit before age 2 to avoid associated emotional and habitual attachments to the objects.

## Tips for correct pacifier use

For infants, correct use and care of pacifiers must be considered. Here are a few tips:

- Purchase orthodontically designed pacifiers.
- Clean pacifiers regularly.
- Check frequently for cracks, discoloration, or tears in pacifiers' rubber. Discard if damaged.
- Replace old pacifiers.
- Wash pacifiers prior to first use.
- Do not tie pacifiers around your infant's neck.
- Offer pacifiers after and between meals, before naps, or at bedtime.

Following these basic rules will help ensure your infant's pacifier use is both safe and healthy.

## Proper pacifier cleaning

The shape and materials of pacifiers make them susceptible to colonization by bacterial organisms, including *Staphylococcus*, which causes staph infections. To prevent the spread of bacteria and disease, clean your child's pacifiers at least once a day. They can be cleaned using mild soap and water. When cleaning pacifiers, make sure to remove all excess water from the nipple, where it can collect and cause bacterial growth. Also, pacifiers that are dishwasher safe can be cleaned easily in the dishwasher; just follow the instructions on the pacifier package.



## Saying goodbye to the pacifier

For some infants, giving up the pacifier can be difficult, especially if they become emotionally attached to the habit. Parents looking to wean their children from the pacifier can begin by offering other alternatives, including:

- Rocking motions, singing, or music before naps or at bedtime.
- Activities and games.
- Toys.

To further help break the pacifier habit, parents also can:

- Limit pacifier use gradually over time.
- Reduce pacifier satisfaction by piercing the pacifier's nipple.
- Dip the pacifier in a safe but undesirable flavor, such as white vinegar.
- Go "cold turkey" and refuse to offer the pacifier.

For more information regarding pacifier use, talk to your doctor or dentist, and visit [KnowYourTeeth.com](http://KnowYourTeeth.com).



The AGD is a member of the Partnership for Healthy Mouths, Healthy Lives, a first-of-its-kind national dental coalition composed of 35 leading dental health organizations. Look for more information about the Kids' Healthy Mouths campaign at [www.2min2x.org](http://www.2min2x.org).

## KnowYourTeeth.com

Brought to you by the AGD, this website answers important dental health questions, offers the latest information on current treatments, provides tips for first-rate oral hygiene, and can help visitors find highly qualified general dentists near where they live.

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