

The Truth About Pacifiers, Sippy Cups, Bottles and Thumbs

By Robin Best, M.A., CCC, P.A.



Parents learn to cope with their baby's fatigue, teething, hunger, crying and behaviors in various ways. The soothing nature of the bottle, pacifiers and thumb are more often than not the tools of choice. Sometimes using the pacifier or bottle or thumb is established by the parents and sometimes by the baby, for comfort. However, there are some guidelines parents may want to know before introducing these items into their child's regime, or when deciding to discontinue their use everyday practice.

Pacifiers, sippy cups, bottles and thumbs are all items in which the oral structure is in a more primitive "suckling" mode. This is not contraindicated when the baby is normally supposed to be in the suckling mode, which is from infancy to about 18 months old or so. By 24 months old the toddler, no longer a baby, should not be using pacifiers, sippy cups or bottles. Getting rid of the thumb is not so easy! For that matter, stopping any of these items can be as painful to the parents as it is disconcerting to the toddler.

Many parents will even put their babies to sleep with a bottle. This is not a good idea for several reasons. Primarily, it can be bad for the teeth (when they exist), nutritional content in the bottle may spoil if the bottle is left in the crib for extended periods, and it can also be unsanitary and unsafe. In addition, it is teaching the baby to rely on the bottle for comfort, which may cause problems later on when you want to eliminate it from the child's routine. A great alternative to the sippy cup is the cup with the hidden straw. These cups also protect our homes, clothing and cars from spillage; they are portable and convenient, as well as promoting better oral motor movement, strength and tone.

When a toddler is using a bottle or pacifier he or she are not exercising the movement of the tongue. The tongue is stationary and passive in a "tongue thrust" position. This may cause future dentalization of speech sounds, tongue thrust, dental and bite malocclusions, and improper tongue and lip posture at rest. It is also conducive to a low tone oral posture. While some children may outgrow these tendencies with delayed elimination of the use of these appliances, many more do not.

Changing habits regarding sucking thumbs is more difficult. There is a paper back book entitled "David Decides about Thumb sucking: A Story for Children, A Guide for Parents", by Susan Heitler, PhD. I have found this book to be very helpful to parents and families.



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Robin Best, M.A., C.C.C., P.A.
 Speech Language Pathologist