

# Should I give my little one a dummy?



Parents choose to give their little one a dummy for lots of different reasons, and this can have both benefits and drawbacks. Many parents are also unsure about when to start helping their child 'give up' their dummy. Our expert info below can help you make the best decision for your little one.



## How do dummies affect children's talking?

- **The research on whether dummies affect children's talking is mixed.** It's possible that when a baby has a dummy in their mouth, this can affect the way they recognise sounds in other people's talking. This would make it harder for them to learn where sounds belong in words.
- **Using a dummy in the day is more likely to affect speech than at night.** Children who use dummies for long periods in the day make more unexpected mistakes in their talking. For example, they may use sounds at the back of their mouth when they should be making a sound at the front (ten ► ken). This could be because dummies stop the use of sounds at the front of the mouth, like 'p', 'm', 'n', 'b', 't', 'd', 's' and 'sh'.
- **When your baby is talking, a dummy might affect how much they can experiment with sounds.** This may make their talking less clear than when they don't have the dummy in their mouth. This could cause frustration if others can't understand them.

## What are the benefits?

- Dummies can be really effective in soothing and comforting young babies, although not all children take to them.
- It's possible that giving a baby a dummy when you put them down to sleep could reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). The evidence for this is unclear, however. Some recommend that you start giving a dummy once breastfeeding is established, when your baby is about 1 month old.

## What are the drawbacks?

- **It's possible that using a dummy could affect the shape and structures inside a child's mouth.** An orthodontic dummy has a special shape that might help reduce the risk of this.
- **Dummies seem to increase the risk of ear infections.** If your little one gets an ear infection, you can try taking the dummy away to reduce the chance of this happening again and again.

## Our recommendations

- If you choose to give your little one a dummy, give it to them every time you put them down to sleep.
- Always make sure the dummy is clean.
- When your child is babbling or starting to learn to talk, make sure you take their dummy away so they can experiment with sounds.
- Think about reducing dummy use when they are learning to talk and for long periods of time in the day.
- When your baby is 6 months old, start to think about removing the dummy so they can be dummy free by 12 months.
- Some children respond well to giving their dummy to a 'dummy fairy'.

Find further information

NHS: Reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)  
The Lullaby Trust Dummies Factsheet

## References

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- Does pacifier use cause ear infections in young children? - Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effects (DARE): Quality-assessed Reviews - NCBI Bookshelf (nih.gov)