

DO I USE A DUMMY?

The use of dummies, also called pacifiers, is something many parents feel very strongly about – either for or against. You may have seen dummies being used more as silencers than comforters, leaving quite a negative impression on you and putting you firmly in the 'against' camp. But now that you're faced with a crying, uncomfortable, inconsolable baby, you might be reconsidering.

Dummies should never be forced on the baby and it's considered best not to give them to a baby under a month old. To help you decide I have written some pros and cons of using a dummy.

THE **PROS**

- **TO SOOTHE**
Most babies have a strong sucking reflex. They can be seen sucking their thumbs or fingers in the womb. Babies often suck to calm or soothe themselves, especially when troubled by colic.
- **FOR DISTRACTION**
A dummy might come in handy to distract the baby during procedures such as vaccinations and blood tests.
- **IT MAY HELP SOME BABIES SLEEP**
If your baby has trouble settling down, a dummy might do the trick.
- **IT MAY REDUCE THE RISK OF SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME (SIDS)**
Research has found an association between
SIDS.
- **DUMMIES ARE DISPOSABLE**
When it's time to stop using dummies, you can throw them away. If your child prefers sucking on their thumb or fingers, it might be more difficult to break the habit.

THE **CONS**

- **DEPENDENCY**
Your baby might become dependent on the dummy. If your baby uses a dummy to sleep, you might face frequent middle-of-the-night crying spells when the dummy falls out of their mouth.
- **RISK OF A MIDDLE EAR INFECTION**
Using a dummy might increase the risk of middle ear infection. However this risk is balanced by the fact that rates of middle ear infection are generally lowest from birth to age six months — which is when the risk of SIDS is the highest and also when your baby might be most interested in a dummy.
- **DENTAL PROBLEMS**
Normal dummy use during the first few years of life doesn't cause long-term dental problems. However, prolonged dummy use might cause a child's top front teeth to slant outward. To avoid this, aim to discard the dummy before your child is one year old. To prevent decay never put sugary stuff on a dummy.
- **SPEAKING PROBLEMS**
Research suggests that children sucking their fingers, a bottle or a dummy past the age of three may develop problems with speaking.
- **HINDERING SOCIAL SKILLS**
Prolonged use of a dummy during waking hours could prevent the child from joining in the chatter of everyday conversation, thereby reducing the opportunities to start learning important social skills.

After reading the pros and cons to using a dummy you still feel uncertain what to decide, I suggest you give yourself time to process the information, and then work with what feels intuitively right for your baby.

There are many ways to help sooth and pacify your baby, and they are all worth trying. Your baby is communicating their needs in the only way they can. It may be the case that your baby just wants to tell you their story; perhaps they've experienced a challenging birth and they need to tell you how they're feeling. It could be very therapeutic for both of you to help your baby to express their emotions. Why not read the 'Facilitated Crying' article and see how you can do this.