

The use of dummies and breastfeeding

This leaflet is intended to provide information based on research evidence so that you can make an informed choice whether or not to give your baby a dummy.

Will sucking on a dummy (pacifiers or soothers) affect breastfeeding?

Babies suck for both comfort and food and therefore breastfed babies can be soothed at the breast without a dummy.

What happens if I give my breastfed baby a dummy?

Dummy use and teats are not advised while you are learning to breastfeed in the first four weeks because:

1. Using a dummy masks babies cues for feeding and or comfort.
2. When using a dummy babies can miss feeds.
3. Missed feeds can reduce your milk supply.

Poor milk supply is the most common reason why women stop breastfeeding ¹.

Dummies can make breastfeeding harder for baby to feed. A dummy is firmer and the shape makes babies suck differently on the dummy to the breast. This may lead to confusion when the baby is put to the breast and this can lead to sore nipples and a decrease in milk supply. Baby may cry more or refuse the breast altogether.

Mothers' problems

When a dummy is introduced the baby may suck differently at the breast causing damage to the mothers nipple. There is an increased risk of engorgement - over filling of the breasts with milk and Mastitis may also occur causing the breast tissue to be painful and inflamed. Painful nipples and breasts can lead to less frequent feeding and a decrease in milk supply. Periods and fertility may return earlier as maternal hormone levels are affected when a baby breastfeeds less.

How to use a dummy

This reduces milk supply which can affect babies weight gain. Poor milk supply is the most common reason why women stop breastfeeding ⁷.

Dummies can be used to calm baby briefly e.g. when you are driving. With a dummy in place babies may smile less and cannot babble giving you less chance to communicate with your baby.

If you decide to use a dummy you need to be aware of the following;

- The manufacturer's instructions should always be followed on cleaning and replacement.
- Do not use a neck tie or cord on the dummy.
- Avoid putting anything sweet onto the dummy.
- Try not to offer the dummy at wake times.
- Some babies refuse to take a dummy. It is important not to force baby to take the dummy.
- You cannot overfeed a breastfed baby so offering the breast instead gives comfort and food to your baby.
- Some babies refuse to take a dummy. It is important not to force baby to take the dummy. Offering the breast instead gives health protection and comfort to your baby. You cannot overfeed a breastfed baby. If your baby is admitted to a Neonatal Unit and a dummy is suggested for clinical reasons, staff will discuss this with you before using one. This is to ensure you are fully informed and consent to the dummy use.
- If baby has a dummy while sleeping it should not be stopped suddenly in the first 26 weeks⁴.

Dental concerns

Breastfeeding is an excellent form of exercise for development of a baby's jaw, tongue and mouth. Regular dummy use can affect the growth of a babies teeth and the shape of baby's mouth. Orthodontic dummies adapt better to babies' mouth.

Infections

Babies can develop oral thrush which can be passed onto breastfeeding mothers. Thrush causes painful breastfeeding, sore, broken and cracked nipples³.

Never put the dummy in your mouth before giving it to your baby.

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

Research into dummies and SIDS ², tends to show that babies who used a dummy during their last sleep were less likely to die, but that routine dummy use is not protective. This may indicate that infants are at greater risk of SIDS if they routinely use a dummy but have not been given their dummy on a particular night. If a parent decides to give a dummy that they must use the dummy every time the baby goes to

sleep (daytime and night time sleeps) etc so that parents use a dummy for all sleeps if baby is left unattended. (UNICEF UK statement on dummy use, sudden infant death syndrome and breastfeeding, Sept, 2005)

Summary

- Dummy use is a personal choice and further research is needed, until more evidence is available it is recommended;
- Breastfeeding is established before introducing a dummy to avoid nipple / dummy confusion.
- If you decided to introduce a dummy it is recommended that you continue to use it at sleep times.
- Use the dummy only for sleep and not to delay or increase times between breastfeeds.
- Do not replace the dummy once it falls out of babies mouth.

References

1. McAndrew, J. et al. (2012) Infant feeding survey 2010. Health and Social Care Information Centre.
2. Fleming P et al (1999). Pacifier use and sudden infant death syndrome: results from the CESDI/SUDI case control study. Arch Dis Child 81:112-116
3. Warren, JJ et al. Pacifier use and the occurrence of otitis media in the first year of life. Pediatric dentistry 2001; 23 (2): 103 – 107
4. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE, 2014) NICE clinical guideline 37. Guidance.nice.org.uk/cg37.

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