

Early Years Communication and Language Development Service

Dummy use – fact sheet

Pros:

- Facilitates sucking patterns in premature babies
- Soothes and settles babies to sleep (however little empirical evidence to support this)
- Possibly prevents Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). This area of investigation is very new, however, and SIDS support organisations do not recommend the use of dummies as a preventative measure
- Reduces pain of teething and potentially helps with weaning
- Presumed to help infants with gastroesophageal reflux (however there is little research to support this)

Cons:

- Positive impact of dummy use declines after 6 months of age- Ideally wean off the dummy from 6 months and discard by 1 year old
- Negative impact on the amount and quality of babble. When a baby or young child has a dummy in their mouth, they are less likely to copy sounds adults make or to attempt to babble and play with sounds themselves. This impacts on speech and language development
- Negative impact on speech sound production. A dummy prevents a child from copying words & sounds back correctly. Many speech sounds are made at the front of the mouth (i.e. p, b, t, d, s). Regular dummy/ bottle users will struggle to develop these sounds and may then need speech therapy. A Manchester study has shown that over half of all dummy users in the area were referred for speech therapy
- Associated with increased risk of gastrointestinal infections, middle ear infections. This is due to the fact that sucking opens the Eustachian tube, which links the nose and middle ear, and this can allow bacteria into the middle ear from the nasal area
- Associated with dental problems (open bite and cross bite).
- Encourages open mouth posture. Children need to learn to control saliva by closing the mouth and swallowing. Overuse of dummies & bottle sucking stops this, leading to drooling and saliva problems. This can then lead to soreness around the mouth.
- Associated with decreased breastfeeding duration (World Health Organisation)

References:

Baker, E. 2002. "The pros and cons of dummies: what a speech pathologist should know" Acquiring knowledge in Speech, Language and Hearing , vol.4, no.3, pp.134-136

<http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk/parents/speech-and-language/do-dummies-affect-speech>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2807168/Should-Harper-Beckham-really-using-dummy-age-three.html>