

Let's Talk about Teeth: Thumb-Sucking

Why do some babies suck their thumb or fingers?



- Babies have the natural urge to suck and may use their thumb to self-soothe.
- Thumb-sucking can become a habit if used for comfort when kids are tired, restless, hungry, scared or bored.
- In rare cases, thumb-sucking after age 5 can be a response to an emotional problem or other disorder, such as anxiety.



Not all children need a thumb, finger or soother.
Consult your public health nurse for ways to teach your baby to self-soothe.



Does thumb-sucking cause problems?



- Thumb-sucking in children younger than age 4 is **usually not** a problem.
- Thumb-sucking in older children can cause adult teeth to be misaligned or pushed outward.
- Teeth may or may not correct themselves when the habit stops.
- Lipping, tongue-thrusting and difficulty pronouncing “T”s and “D”s can be associated with thumb-sucking.

Children may need help stopping when they...

- Are still sucking their thumb at age 4.
- Ask for help to stop.
- Develop dental or speech problems.
- Feel embarrassed, teased or shamed by others.



How to break the habit!



- Visit your dentist if your child is still sucking their thumb at age 4.
- Never shame or punish your child.
- Try setting rules by limiting the time and place your child can suck their thumb.
- Provide distractions and put away blankets or things associated with thumb-sucking.
- Using gloves or bandaging the thumb may discourage the habit.
- Offer praise, positive attention, or rewards.

