

If you are breastfeeding, wait until feeding is established before you offer a dummy.

Formula feeding babies can be offered a dummy from birth.

- Choose a dummy that has an Australian Standards label.
- Dummies need to be cleaned, checked for damage, and replaced regularly.
- Babies under twelve months need their dummy sterilised.

Reasons for and advantages of using a dummy

- Sucking on a dummy can help relax and settle babies.
- Using a dummy for periods of non-nutritive sucking in premature babies who are not receiving oral feeds has been shown to help with their growth and development.
- Offering a dummy to premature babies during a tube-feed may help with their digestion and help them associate sucking with receiving milk.
- There is evidence that dummies are associated with a reduced risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) in some circumstances (breastfeeding also reduces the risk of SIDS). For further information see <https://rednose.org.au/news/using-a-dummy-safely>.

Disadvantages of using a dummy

- Dummy use may have a negative impact on breastfeeding. Using a dummy in the early weeks may affect a baby's ability to suck on the breast and cause baby's hunger cues to be missed. This may affect milk production and the baby's weight gain.
- Using a dummy may reduce a breastfed baby's time sucking at the breast. The mouth actions used by a breastfeeding baby promotes optimal jaw and oral development. A dummy does not.
- Dummies increase the risk of infections and accidents. In particular, ear infections are more common in babies who use dummies.
- Dummies can become an unhelpful sleep association and prevent responsive parenting.
- Dummies can cause dental problems if used for lengthy periods or beyond 6 months.
- Weaning from the dummy can be difficult.

Recommendations if you choose to use a dummy

- Breastfeeding babies should not be offered a dummy until breastfeeding is established, usually after the first 4 to 6 weeks. After this, only offer the dummy when you are sure your baby is not hungry. This helps to ensure that dummy sucking does not interfere with breastfeeding.
- The dummy should fit the mouth comfortably. Use age guidelines for sizing.
- Do not tie the dummy to anything. This is a strangulation risk.
- Dummies should not be dipped in anything sweet as this can cause tooth decay.
- Infants and children with chronic or recurrent ear infections should not use a dummy.
- Start phasing out the use of a dummy by the end of the first year. Dummies should definitely be discontinued by 2-3 years to reduce the risk of dental malocclusion.

Care of the dummy

- Follow manufacturer's guidelines.
- Dummies need to be kept clean and replaced regularly.
- Wash with warm, soapy water and rinse well. Make sure to squeeze out any fluid that gets inside. Dry with a clean and dry paper towel and store in a clean, sealed container.
- Dummies should be sterilised for babies under twelve months.
- Check the dummy regularly and replace it if it is broken or worn. Babies can choke on any loose bits.
- If your baby is diagnosed with thrush or an infection, replace dummies.

Resources

- Your Midwife, Child and Family Health Nurse, or Lactation Consultant
 - Australian Breastfeeding Association www.breastfeeding.asn.au Helpline: 1800 686 268.
 - Rednose / SIDS and KIDS: rednose.org.au.
 - Raising Children Network www.Raisingchildren.net.au
 - Australian Infant Feeding Guidelines (2012) www.eatforhealth.gov.au
- If you need an interpreter, please call Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450

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