

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary

Title: Pacifiers and Breast-feeding

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Plain Language Summary:

Why is breast-feeding important?

Breast-feeding offers many benefits to your baby. Breast milk protects babies from infection and allergies. Breast milk also has important nutrients that help your baby grow. It may also help your health. Some types of cancer occur less often in mothers who have breastfed their babies. Women who don't have health problems, such as TB or HIV, should try to give their babies breast milk for at least the first six months of life.

Why would a baby want a pacifier?

Most babies have a strong sucking reflex. Some babies suck their thumbs or fingers even before they're born. Beyond eating, sucking often has a calming effect.

Why are pacifiers good for babies?

- A pacifier may calm a fussy baby.
- A pacifier may soothe your baby and help her fall asleep.
- Pacifiers may reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Studies have found a link between pacifier use during sleep and a lower risk of SIDS.
- Pacifiers are disposable. When you want your baby to stop using pacifiers, you can throw them away. If he prefers to suck on his thumb or fingers, it may be harder to break the habit.

Are there any drawbacks?

- Pacifier use may increase the risk of ear infections.
- If used too long, pacifiers can cause dental problems. Most kids wean off pacifiers between 2-4 years. If used longer, permanent teeth might not come in straight.
- The pacifier can become a habit. Try not to overuse pacifiers. Try calming first by rocking or nursing.

Do pacifiers make breast-feeding more difficult?

Early use may interfere with breast-feeding. Sucking on a pacifier and sucking on a breast are different actions. Some babies have trouble learning how to nurse if given a



pacifier too soon. If started after 15 days, pacifiers don't shorten the length of breastfeeding.

The bottom line:

- Pacifiers are okay to use while breast-feeding.
- Many of the benefits outweigh the risks.
- Studies have shown that “nipple confusion” is mostly a myth.
- Using a pacifier should be a personal choice. Let your baby guide your decision.

Additional Resources:

Mayo Clinic: Pacifiers -- <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/pacifiers/PR00067>

Healthy Children: Pacifier Safety -- <http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/crying-colic/Pages/Pacifiers-Satisfying-Your-Babys-Needs.aspx>

AAFP: Helpful Tips for Breast-feeding: <http://www.aafp.org/afp/2008/0715/p233.html>

Key Words:

Breast-feeding

Pacifiers

SIDS

Breast milk

Sucking

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