



Practical Pacifier Principles

Pacifiers have proven themselves to be yet one more source of parenting controversy. Breastfeeding purists say stick to your guns and keep them out of your newborn's mouth—even when your baby is not yet able to use his own fingers as an alternative. (We would note that if and when your baby is able to find his own fingers, it's OK to let him continue using them as natural pacifiers.) Others forewarn that pacifiers are simply a bad habit waiting to happen. Well fear not, as long as you understand a few practical pacifier principles and pitfalls. In fact, pacifiers have, in recent years, earned the status of a valuable ally in the fight against sudden infant death syndrome. Whether you choose to breastfeed or bottle-feed, or a combination of both, here are some tips for if and when you decide to give your baby a pacifier.



- **Soothing through sucking.** Pacifiers can be invaluable in soothing babies as well as satisfying those who want to suck all the time. You need not worry about your baby developing a lifelong dependency on them. Just be very careful not to offer your newborn a pacifier at times when he really should be fed instead because pacifiers can inappropriately pacify hungry babies as well as those who are looking for comfort.
- **Picking out the perfect pacifier.** These days, picking the perfect pacifier may seem like a considerable task, given all of the various brands and styles on the market. To the best of our knowledge, there's no correlation between price or marketing strategy and effectiveness, so we simply recommend trying one out and seeing if your baby likes it.
- **If at first you don't succeed.** When you first offer your baby a pacifier, don't be surprised if he seems uninterested, gets downright angry, or spits it out even when you know he's not hungry and just wants comfort. For breastfed babies, sucking on a pacifier inherently requires a different technique, and one that may take a few tries. For breastfed and bottlefed babies alike, a nipple that does not provide milk may not be quickly welcomed. As you offer your baby a pacifier, try lightly stroking just to the side of his mouth and then gently holding the pacifier in his mouth for a moment as he starts sucking to keep it from popping right back out.
- **A practical pacifier substitute.** The cheap, easy, and ever-present pacifier substitute: your pinky finger. If you find yourself in the position of wanting to soothe your baby by giving him something to suck on other than your breast, you can always use your (clean) little finger. Simply turn your hand palm-side up and let your baby suck on your pinky finger, allowing it to rest gently in the roof of his mouth. As a word of caution for anyone with longer fingernails than ours—you may want to rethink how much you value your long nails, or at least the one on your little finger. You may find that it's a small sacrifice to make to clip it shorter for the sake of having a contented baby. Some babies will learn to find their own fingers to suck on earlier than others, so do your best to make sure those fingers are clean (and have clipped nails too!)
- **Passing on pacifiers.** If your baby just isn't that much of a "sucker," he may not need to be soothed by sucking on a pacifier at all. Just be thankful that there's one less thing to keep track of during the day, and just consider offering one as he is falling asleep.

Author Laura A. Jana, MD, FAAP and Jennifer Shu, MD, FAAP

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