

EFFECTS OF LONG TERM PACIFIER USE

Sucking is one of the earliest natural reflexes and is normal for infants. It is a way to explore their environment and to provide comfort. For this reason, pacifiers are perfectly appropriate during a baby's first year. It is when pacifier use extends beyond 12-18 months of age that concerns begin to arise.

AROUND 12-13 MONTHS OF AGE, A COUPLE MAJOR MILESTONES ARE HAPPENING IN BABY'S LIFE:

- 1. The infant suckle-swallow pattern is being eliminated and replaced with a more mature adult-like swallow pattern where the tongue elevates to the roof of the mouth*
- 2. Language skills are starting to take off! Baby is starting to imitate sounds heard around them and saying their first words.*

UNFORTUNATELY, PACIFIER USE CAN HAVE A MAJOR NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THESE DEVELOPMENTS

When a child uses a pacifier past 12-18 months of age, it can impede the tongue's development of a mature swallow pattern. A pacifier nipple rests over the front portion of the tongue, preventing the elevation to the roof of the mouth that is necessary for mature swallowing. In addition, a pacifier is a huge obstruction in the mouth when baby's tongue is learning to navigate around to imitate sounds and form words.

SOME OTHER NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF PROLONGED PACIFIER USE INCLUDE:

- Atypical development of palate, gums, and teeth, which can impact both feeding and articulation.
- Increased risk of middle ear infections, as continuous sucking on a pacifier causes the auditory tubes to become abnormally open. Middle ear infections can play a major role in speech delays.
- Dependency, which can lead to increased frustration and tantrums as a child's ability to self-soothe will be lacking

SO...WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Wean slowly by allowing the pacifier during sleeping times only, then eliminate nap time and eventually bed time
- Introduce a new comfort item as a replacement
- Use other calming methods such as cuddling, rocking, music, etc.
- Help your child decorate a box and pack pacifiers to "gift" to a new baby since they're a big kid now
- Gather all pacifiers to leave for the "Binky Fairy" to collect in exchange for a new toy
- Go cold turkey
- Get everyone on board and remain CONSISTENT

