



Weaning Your Toddler From a Pacifier

Originally published in American Baby magazine, February 2004

When should you wean your child from a pacifier?

Although there is no specific age a child should be weaned from their pacifier, a good age to start would be about 18 months. When we say start, we mean to start the gradual process. Although some parents go "cold turkey" with removing the pacifier, we recommend a more gradual approach.

Why wean?

Possible side effects of prolonged pacifier use include:

- **Tooth Misalignment:** Depending on how long your child sucks on her pacifier, they could end up with a small deformity in the upper jaw, which could cause her upper teeth to misalign.
- **Slowed Language Development:** With a pacifier stuck in your baby's mouth all the time, they are less likely to babble and experiment with sound. This lack of practice could lead to slow language development.
- **Increased Ear Infections:** Pediatricians say that pacifier use has caused a 50% rise in ear infections.

How do I wean my child off a pacifier?

-Start Gradually

Start with only giving them a pacifier at nap or bed times to soothe themselves to sleep. Tell them that their pacifier is only for sleepy time. Gradually work the pacifier out of the nap time routine, until they are only using it to sleep at night. Eventually "lose" the pacifier for bedtime. Your toddler should adjust within a couple of days.

-Substitute Other Tools

If your child won't give up the pacifier, have them trade it in for another toy or a special activity. At night, give your toddler a stuffed animal or special blanket instead of the pacifier for comfort.

-Peer Pressure

Keep your toddler playing with other children so that they model their behavior from them. (Choose nonpacifier sucking playmates)

-Rewards

Try a Reward Chart and give them stickers for getting through the day without their pacifier, if they are old enough to understand this. Give them lots of hugs, kisses, and "I'm proud of you's".

-Be Consistent

Do not give in to your toddler through a tantrum or bedtime crying. If you eventually give in and give them the pacifier, they will become confused. Stick to your guns and they will come around.
