

Do dummies affect speech?



Advantages of using a dummy

For parents and carers, the most important advantage of the use of dummies is their role in helping babies or very young toddlers, settle down to sleep or to soothe them if they are upset.

Disadvantages

There are a number of disadvantages associated with the use of dummies, most of which impact upon the child's speech and language development. Other concerns raised by various professional groups include the increased risk of:

- stomach and mouth infections;
- middle ear infections (otitis media). This is due to the fact that sucking opens the Eustachian tube, which links the nose and middle ear, and this can allow bacteria into the middle ear from the nasal area;
- dental problems such as open bite and cross bite;
- overdevelopment of the muscles at the front of the mouth compared to those at the back of the mouth which may lead to a persistent tongue thrust and further effect placement of the teeth;
- reduced babbling and experimentation with sounds. When a baby or young child has a dummy in their mouth they are less likely to copy sounds adults make or to attempt to babble and play with sounds themselves. This is important in the development of speech skills.

There is a lot of confusing advice available about the use of dummies and it is important to be aware of the range of arguments. Dummies may be useful in settling young babies and encouraging strong sucking patterns, but their specific usefulness declines after a developmental age of about six months.

The increased risk of ear infections, dental problems and limiting of babbling and use of sounds (both of which are essential in the development of speech and language skills) are all very good reasons for not giving dummies to infants after about one year of age, especially during the day and when they are interacting with other children and adults.