



# Pacifiers

## Habits and What to Expect

Does your child wake during the night or early from a nap because his pacifier has fallen out? If you put the pacifier back in quickly, does your child return to sleep right away? Then it's clear that the pacifier helps your child to sleep.

### Age 3 to 7 months

Until they are about 7 months old, most infants are unable to put the pacifier in themselves correctly and reliably. Before this time, if your child wakes once or twice a night, and all you have to do is put the pacifier in and she returns to sleep, you could continue this practice until she is old enough to get it herself. On the other hand, if your child is waking three to four times a night or more for the pacifier, and in addition the naps are affected (you must run in and give the pacifier 30 minutes into every nap his sleep quality (as well as yours) may be significantly compromised) and it may be advisable to teach your child to sleep without the pacifier.

### What if I don't want to take the pacifier away?

If your child is waking frequently in need of the pacifier (three or more times every night) and you are reluctant to take the pacifier away, you could set up a bed in the child's room right next to the crib and sleep there during the night - this way you can merely reach over and put the pacifier in when needed. However, you would have to continue this practice until the child can get the pacifier himself and you risk your child realizing you are sleeping in the room.

### When should I stop helping her get the pacifier at night?

Observe your child during playtime to see if she is able to pick up the pacifier and put it in correctly (repositioning it if necessary). If she can, she is ready to do this at night. This usually occurs at the age of 6 ½ to 7 ½ months. If she continues to wake at night wanting you to help with the pacifier, begin this procedure:

- For two consecutive nights, each time she wakes and wants help with pacifier, go in to her quickly, put a pacifier in her hand (or one in both hands) instead of her mouth and push the other pacifiers toward her, forcing her to put one in her mouth herself.
- After two nights, if she is still waking, go in to her quickly and push the pacifiers toward her each time she wakes, not putting them in her hand.
- If your child is still waking after this, wait for her to be upset 5-10 minutes each time she wakes, then go in and push the pacifiers toward her.

Within a few nights, you should no longer have to go in to offer help with the pacifier – your child might wake several times, put her pacifier in herself and return to sleep on her own.

Try to ensure that the pacifiers are not falling out of the crib too easily or getting stuck in the corners of the crib – consider putting seven to 10 pacifiers in the crib each time she sleeps. If you find ALL the pacifiers are on the floor every time the child wakes, you may need to consider clipping the pacifier to the shoulder of the child's sleepwear.

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# Giving Up the Pacifier

A child's sucking instinct typically diminishes at the age of 12 months. After your child has been sleeping well (through the night) for at least six weeks with a "sleep only" pacifier, it may be time to consider eliminating the pacifier completely.

## "Sleep Only"

Reducing the pacifier use to "sleep only" and allowing the child to have it only at night and naps (or during illness and travel) can start around 12-13 months of age. Start first thing in the morning – leave the pacifier in the crib or in the bed. If your child has NOT been allowed to have the pacifier other than at nap time at daycare, start on a day your child has daycare. If they have used the pacifier at daycare, it may be best to start on a Friday night. The parent or daycare provider will need to use various forms of distraction to help the child get through this time. Be careful that your child doesn't use a bottle or cup as a replacement for the pacifier, but a blanket or stuffed animal would be appropriate as long as it is safe for his age.

The first time the child falls asleep without the pacifier should be at bedtime. Start on a weekend when your child has been sleeping well and is not sick, and allow bedtime to be a little late the first night. Put your child down awake without the pacifier, but expect some fussing, possibly crying. If your child cries significantly before falling asleep, go in to her to give reassurance (do not pick her up) every five minutes to 10 minutes (three to four times). During the night, you will likely hear some fussing, whining and possibly some crying, but typically parents do not need to go to the child if under 16 months of age. If your child is older, you may need to go to the child. Consider going to the child to offer reassurance and a brief hug (without picking the child up) perhaps every 10 minutes while the child is upset.

The following day, it will be very hard for the child to nap without the pacifier, so we recommend "cheating" by allowing the child to fall asleep in the car. It won't be the best nap but certainly better than no nap. The parent should NOT put the child down with the pacifier for the nap or the child will become greatly confused.

The second night the parent should hear less fussing and by the third night the child should be sleeping fairly well. The parent should also not have to go to the child as often the second and third nights. The parent may need to continue to "cheat" on the nap for two to three days if the child is over age 18 months. Once the child is falling asleep easily without the pacifier at night at bedtime with little or no crying, she is likely to be able to fall asleep for the nap without the pacifier and the nap should be tried in the crib.

If at any point the child is crying and screaming at bedtime or during a night waking for more than an hour, you may need to consider the possibility of illness and will most likely need to return the pacifier

## Other Tips:

It can be a little less painful for the child to give up the pacifier if the parent also considers the following:

- For several weeks prior to giving up the pacifier, attach the pacifier to a small baby blanket (a tab with a snap can be sewn onto the blanket to attach the pacifier; the pacifier can be removed each time the blanket needs to be washed). The goal is for the child to associate the blanket with the pacifier – they are always together. When it comes time to eliminate the pacifier, the parent removes the pacifier from the blanket, and the child still has the blanket and often has already formed an attachment to it.
- The parent may also consider putting the child down with the pacifier handles – cutting off the rubbery part that goes into the mouth. The handles **MUST BE LARGE ENOUGH** that the child cannot get it into the mouth and choke. The pacifier handles seem to be greatly appreciated by most children - they typically take them and rub them on their face and hands, which seems to be comforting. The pacifier handles also retain some of the smell that the child likes. The child can continue to sleep with the handles as long as they are safe. Generally, it is NOT a good idea to cut a hole in the binky so that the child is unable to suck on it: the problem is that many children will then chew on it and pieces of it get swallowed.
- It may be unwise to tell the child age 2 and older that the pacifier must be given to the Easter Bunny, Santa, or other babies because of the possibility of strong resentment, especially if the parent suggests giving it to a baby sibling.
- Try not to make the child feel badly about having the binky. Chances are, it was the parent that started it, and then it becomes a habit for the child. However, it is significantly easier for a child to give up a pacifier than thumb or finger sucking.
- If your child is age 3 or older, consider telling him that the pacifier must be stopped on a particular date. Perhaps give him 1-2 weeks warning and explain that sucking on the pacifier must be stopped for the proper development of the teeth. Allow him to have the pacifier handles or consider the blanket approach described above (or both).
- Consider also using a "forced" reward system; this means that he is forced to give up the pacifier but the parent gives some incentives. It usually does NOT work to ask a child to earn stickers/rewards each day he does not use the pacifier because invariably some days the child will elect to use it and this makes the process more painful for the child.