

# THUMB SUCKING



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Placing the finger or thumb on the roof of the mouth behind the teeth and sucking with lips and teeth closed. Thumb sucking is common in infants and young children and is a behavior, not a disorder.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Sucking of the thumb. It is most likely to occur before going to sleep, watching TV, or when hungry, ill, or tired.

### CAUSES

Thumb sucking is one of the first acts that an infant can do that brings pleasure. The need to suck is present in all babies. They will suck on almost anything that they can bring into contact with their mouths.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

None known.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Thumb sucking is normal and does not need to be prevented. The behavior is calming and soothing to a baby.
- Provide pacifiers early in infancy if you desire. They cause no health problems. Once your child no longer needs a pacifier for their sucking need, you can start to wean them from pacifier use.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Some babies stop thumb sucking by age one. In most cases, the habit is given up by the time a child is 3 or 4 years old.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Thumb sucking that continues past age 6. It could cause problems with your child's mouth or teeth. Also, the child may get teased by others about the baby-like behavior. Parents should work with the child to change the habit for the sake of appearance and dental health.



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- No treatment or action is usually necessary. Talk to your child's health care provider if you have any questions or concerns about thumb sucking.
- For a child over age 6 or 7 who sucks the thumb or fingers, follow the advice of your child's health care provider, or try those listed here:
  - Give the child extra attention.
  - Watch the child's behavior to see if conflicts or anxiety seems to provoke sucking. Help the child explore other ways to cope with stress.
  - If the child decides to try to stop sucking, help the child set goals. Give rewards for any progress toward the goal. Reward is not a bribe, but something earned through effort.
  - Methods such as scolding, shaming, and nagging are usually of no avail. Other methods do not always work either. These include mittens, bad-tasting substances on the thumb, elbow splints, and others.
  - Consult your child's dentist for help as well. The dentist may fit a training device in the child's mouth to prevent the thumb from touching the roof of the mouth.

### MEDICATIONS

Drugs are usually not necessary for this disorder.

### ACTIVITY

No limits.

### DIET

No special diet.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

Your child wishes to stop thumb sucking and self-help methods are not working.

Special notes:

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More notes on the back of this page