



Pacifiers

By Barbara Wilson-Clay, BS, IBCLC

New mothers are surprised to discover how much time newborns want to spend at the breast. It helps to learn that this is exactly what the baby needs to do to gain weight and bring in a good milk supply. Babies need more than food, though. Babies get thirsty, and they need comfort and security. The breast satisfies all these needs. Substituting a pacifier can interfere with this perfect system designed to protect your baby.

Many studies show that pacifier use has some risks. If a baby spends too much time on a pacifier, the breast may not get enough stimulation to make a full milk supply. Using a pacifier to delay feedings may limit a baby's growth. Mothers risk getting plugged ducts and mastitis if the pacifier interferes with good breast emptying. Pacifiers get dirty. Babies who suck pacifiers have more ear infections and more cases of oral thrush. Some experts warn that over-use of pacifiers results in early weaning of babies.

This does not mean that parents of a breastfed baby should never use a pacifier. A mother with milk oversupply may need to use a pacifier to help her baby get some sucking needs met. Some babies may need the pacifier only to stay calm while riding in the car seat. Occasionally babies with special needs or problems will benefit from pacifiers that are used therapeutically. As in all things, a sensible balance is important.

Babies naturally begin to space out their feedings as they grow. They learn to take water from a cup, and accept other ways of soothing. But in the early months, the breast perfectly meets all of a baby's needs while maintaining a close mother-child bond during those important weeks after birth. The pacifier is a poor substitute for the real thing.

Editors:

Kathleen B. Bruce BSN IBCLC, RLC
Catherine Watson Genna BS, IBCLC, RLC

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