

Pacifiers (soothers) and breastfeeding in the Special Care Nursery

Does my breastfed baby need a pacifier?

If your newborn baby is healthy and breastfeeding, the Canadian Pediatric Society recommends not using a pacifier until breastfeeding is fully established. This takes about 4 to 6 weeks. During this time, your baby needs to suck at the breast to learn how to breastfeed.

When your baby wants to suck, he or she usually needs to feed. The more your baby sucks at your breasts, the more milk your breasts will make. This is most important in the first 4 to 6 weeks, when breastfeeding is getting started.


Using a pacifier during this time can interfere with breastfeeding:

- After sucking on a pacifier, your baby may find it hard to latch on to the breast. This can make it painful when your baby latches on.
- Using a pacifier reduces sucking at your breast, which may cause a drop in your milk supply.

Once breastfeeding is going well, you can choose whether or not to give your baby a pacifier.

How can I settle my baby without using a pacifier?

When your baby is fussy, here are some ways to soothe and calm your baby:

- Make sure your baby's diaper is clean and dry.
- Try to breastfeed if your baby shows signs of being hungry. 
- If your baby is too fussy to latch on to the breast, try cuddling your baby skin-to-skin. Undress your baby (leave the diaper on) and hold him or her upright against your bare breasts.
- Rock, talk or sing to your baby.
- Wash your hands and let your baby suck on a clean finger.

Signs that your baby is hungry and ready to feed:

- moving eyes rapidly behind closed eyelids
- bringing arms and hands close to the face
- licking or sucking hands or anything close to the mouth
- turning head from side to side
- crying

When is a pacifier recommended?

There are times when the temporary use of a pacifier may be helpful.

- If your baby needs a special test (such as car seat testing, an x-ray or CT scan, sucking on a pacifier can help your baby settle and lie still during the test. This helps to get the best results from the test.
- Occasionally, a baby having phototherapy may need soothing. Caution: It is important to be sure your baby is well fed before using the pacifier. A decrease in feedings could cause the bilirubin level to rise. The pacifier will be thrown away when the test or treatment is over.

In the Special Care Nursery:

- If your baby is very premature, sick and not able to breastfeed, research shows that sucking on a pacifier can benefit your baby. Your baby's nurse may also give your baby a pacifier when you cannot be there to comfort your baby. As your baby begins learning to breastfeed, the pacifier will be used only when necessary.

What happens if my baby won't latch after being given a pacifier?

Your nurse or lactation consultant will help you if your baby has trouble with breastfeeding after using a pacifier. If your baby is still having trouble when you leave the hospital, tell your nurse. The nurse can tell you where to get help and support with breastfeeding in your community.

For more information:

- talk with your doctor, midwife, lactation consultant or nurse
- visit the Canadian Pediatric Society's website:
www.cps.ca/caringforkids/pregnancy&babies/pacifiers.htm

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