

Comfort and safety: choosing and using dummies and comforters



Highlights

Dummies and comforters can help babies soothe and settle
Dummies may reduce the risk of SIDS when used consistently
Wait until breastfeeding is well established before introducing a dummy
Always check dummies and comforters for safety issues
Prolonged use beyond age four may affect teeth alignment

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Should you use a dummy or comforter?

Whether to use a dummy or comfort item is a personal decision. If you're breastfeeding, it's best to wait until it's firmly established-around 4 to 6 weeks-before offering a dummy. Comforters like soft toys or fabric items should be avoided before 7 months due to suffocation risks.

Some babies have a strong need to suck between feeds and find relief in using a dummy. Research suggests that consistent dummy use may reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Babies may also grow attached to comforting items like soft fabrics, a parent's clothing, or sentimental toys.

What comforters are safe for babies?

Not all items marketed as comforters are safe for infants. Keep these precautions in mind:

- Ensure the item is intact, clean, and free from hazards
- Avoid toys with dummies attached
- Don't place soft toys in the cot before 7 months of age
- Skip items with batteries, magnets, or dangling cords

Dummy safety and hygiene guidelines

Using a dummy comes with some responsibilities. Here's how to keep it safe:

- Regularly inspect for wear and replace as advised by the manufacturer
- Never tie a dummy to clothing or bedding
- Store away from heat and sunlight to avoid damage
- Confirm that the dummy has no loose or weak parts
- Don't dip it in anything sweet-this can lead to tooth decay
- Clean after each use with soap and hot water, and sterilize regularly
- If your baby gets frequent ear infections, consider limiting dummy use

Look for dummies that are:

- The correct size for your baby's age
- Made with secure, one-piece construction
- Designed with ventilation holes on the shield

Introducing a dummy to your baby

If breastfeeding, wait until the baby is feeding well before using a dummy-usually around 4 to 6 weeks. Bottle-fed babies can use one earlier. Remember that wanting to suck may sometimes be a cue for more feeding or comfort-follow your baby's lead.

Teething and dummy use

During teething, babies often seek oral relief. Those already used to a dummy may want it more frequently. This can be soothing but should still be monitored to avoid overuse.

Amber beads: risks and concerns

Amber teething necklaces are marketed for pain relief, but their effectiveness is unproven and they pose real safety concerns. The small beads can be a choking hazard if the necklace breaks, and magnetic clasps (on some designs) can be dangerous if swallowed.

If you choose to use amber beads:

Never allow your baby to wear one while sleeping or unsupervised
Don't let them chew or mouth the beads

When and how to stop dummy use

Most children give up the dummy between ages 2 and 4. Extended use after permanent teeth come in can affect dental development. It's best to limit dummy use to sleep times and avoid letting your child speak with a dummy in their mouth, as this may impact speech skills.

Helping your child let go of the dummy

Weaning can be done step-by-step or all at once. Techniques that help include:

Limiting use gradually to naps and bedtime

Offering alternative comfort methods like cuddles or a favorite toy

Creating a goodbye ritual-some families choose to "gift" the dummy to a baby animal or throw a goodbye party

Tools and Assistance

Talk to your child health nurse about safe dummy and comforter use

Use age-appropriate dummies with built-in safety features

Read labels carefully before using any comfort product

Sterilize dummies as you would bottles and teats

Watch for signs of wear or irritation on your baby's skin