

Soother guide for parents

In love we grow. medela 
baby

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As parents, you want nothing more than to nurture your bond with your little one, grow together in love and closer to each other everyday. You want your children to grow happy and healthy, enabled by the early choices you make with them.

How to use soothers responsibly

There are different opinions when it comes to how and when to use a soother – and it is completely normal to have questions. Each baby is unique, and we believe parents will know and do what’s best for their little ones. With that in mind, the purpose of this guide is to share what we know so you can make the most educated choices around when to use a soother and how to introduce one responsibly.

Suckling is an innate, natural reflex of most babies. When babies suckle to calm themselves or self-soothe to sleep without nursing, experts call this non-nutritive sucking (NNS). Non-nutritive sucking has already been observed in the womb when the baby practises suckling on their hands or fingers. Introducing a soother can help satisfy your little one’s natural desire to suckle.

Parents have given their babies objects to suckle on for centuries. When choosing a soother today, important criteria come into play, such as weight, material, softness, flexibility and the shape of the shield and teat.

What can a soother do for my baby?

The soother can...

- satisfy your baby's natural suckling desires after he or she has been fed but still wants to suckle.
- help to calm and relax babies¹ when other comfort attempts have failed. Suckling on a soother helps them to regulate their emotions.²
- help reduce babies' feelings of pain,³ such as during vaccination or when a blood sample is taken.
- give additional practice for exercising mouth muscles, thus supporting oral development.⁴
- be offered at sleep times and may help to reduce the risk of cot death, especially if he or she is breastfed.^{5,6}

True or False?



Using a soother shortens the length of time that a mother breastfeeds.

False: The opinions of healthcare professionals are sometimes divided on when is the right time to start using a soother. Scientific evidence shows that using a soother from birth will not harm the initiation and duration of breastfeeding in healthy term babies, especially when mothers are motivated to breastfeed.⁷ Many parents choose to offer a soother and **start once lactation is established and breastfeeding is working well for mother and baby.**

Soothers cause eventual misalignment of the teeth.

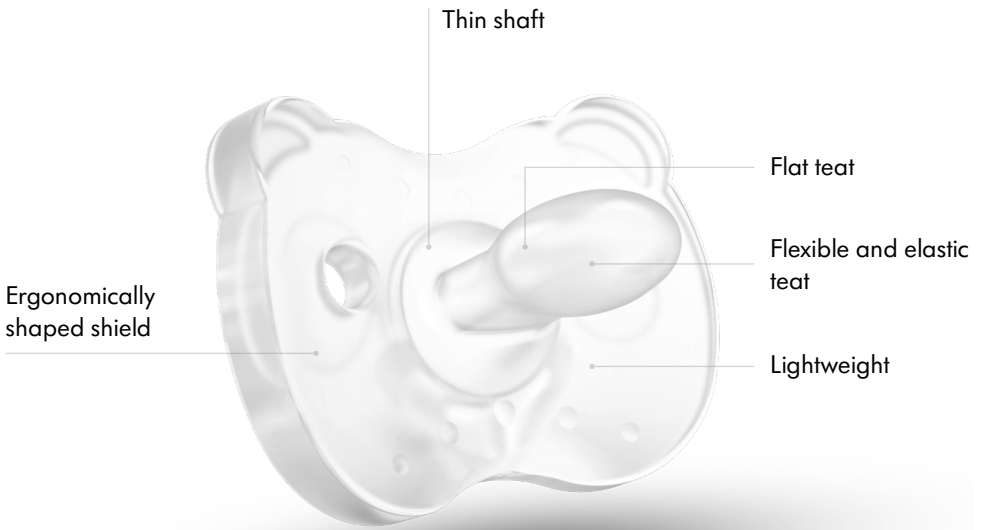
False: Soother use **should be limited** to less than 6 hours per day.⁸

With that in mind, each child's mouth and teeth develop differently. Using soothers for children older than 24 months should be a decision made by each parent, based on consultation with a medical or dental health care provider. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends that weaning should start at the latest by 3 years of age.⁹

The limited and responsible use of a soother should not cause problems with misaligned teeth. Choose a soother shape that supports oral development, which is usually indicated by the word „orthodontic“ on the package.



What does the ideal soother look like?



Speech-language pathologists recommend the following requirements to be incorporated into soother design to help support the natural movement of mouth muscles.¹⁰

- Thin shaft that minimises the space between the upper and lower jaw.
- Flat teat that takes up less space in the mouth allowing for more tongue movement.
- Flexible and elastic teat that allows for additional tongue movement.
- Lightweight structure that minimises the work of the facial muscles.
- Ergonomic shield that helps the soother fit the contour of the face and prevent pressure points.

How can I keep my soothers clean and safe for my baby?

Here are some helpful tips to help keep your little one's soothers in a clean, quality condition:

Boil the soother in water for 5 minutes before first use. Allow it to thoroughly and completely cool before use. If needed, squeeze any remaining water out of the teat that may have collected while boiling.

Sterilise the soother regularly, especially if you live in a region where the water is not safe.

- in boiling water,
- or using an electric home steriliser
- or with steam sterilisation using the microwave and the sterilisation box when included with the soother.

Wash your little one's soother **with warm water** between uses.

If the soother falls on the floor, **avoid putting it in your own mouth** to clean it, as this could transfer bacteria and viruses to your baby.

Firmly pull on the teat and carefully inspect it for tears or holes before each use. **Always replace your soothers at the first sign of wear or damage.**

Replace soothers **every 1 – 2 months** that have been in daily use. Replace soothers immediately after the child has had any infectious illness, such as a cold or stomach flu.

Use a protection cap or box to help keep the soother clean when out and about.

Weaning your little one from the soother: we strongly recommend against shortening the teat by cutting it off or damaging it in any way. Doing so could potentially lead to choking as a result of your baby swallowing tiny parts. For helpful tips to get you through this stage of the journey, refer to „Goodbye soother!“

Five important points to know for responsible soother use



■ 1. When can I start to offer my baby a soother?

Soothers can be used from birth.

If you're breastfeeding, you may prefer to start offering the soother when you and your baby have a well-established nursing relationship.

Research has shown that soother use in healthy breastfeeding babies, having started from birth or after lactation is established, didn't significantly affect the prevalence or duration of exclusive and partial breastfeeding up to four months of age.⁷

Remember, when in doubt, you can always seek professional breastfeeding support from a lactation consultant or other healthcare professional to address any lactation questions or concerns..

■ 2. Learn your baby's language.

No parent likes to hear their baby cry! It breaks your heart and makes you feel helpless trying to understand your little one. However, babies can cry or fuss for different reasons. It's just one of the ways they communicate with you and let you know that they need something. This is part of your journey learning about each other and growing together.

Depending on what your baby needs, his or her cry can sound different. Does your little one want to be held? Is he or she scared or in pain? Is it time for a nappy change, or does he or she simply want your attention? You will soon become familiar with the different cries and body language of your baby, but if they seem inconsolable then offering a soother may help to calm them and encourage self-soothing.

When playing and happy, children are busy and distracted by other positive experiences. This is a good time to put the soother aside as it may not be needed.

Babies grow so fast! And when they start babbling, help them learn to remove the soother from their mouth, so you can better understand each other and enjoy this precious moment.

■ 3. In what situations can a soother help your baby?



Soothers for calming and relaxing

Soothers are most often used to calm and relax. When other methods to calm your little one fail, a soother may support their desire to suckle. Soothers can also be used to help your baby fall asleep.

Using soothers at sleep times

There is evidence that offering the soother at all sleep times may offer some protection against cot death, especially if babies are breastfed.^{5,6} Safe infant sleep guidelines in various countries support the use of a soother during nap times and bedtime in the first six months of life and often up to one year of age. If the soother falls out of the mouth during sleep, you do not need to reinsert it. However, if your baby refuses the soother, then don't force them to take it.⁶

Support baby through painful experiences

There is scientific evidence that shows suckling on a soother helps reduce babies' feelings of discomfort during a painful procedure, such as receiving an immunisation or having a blood sample taken.³

Once your baby begins teething, suckling can help relieve the stress and pain associated with this development. However, if your baby starts to bite holes into the soother, offer a teether to chew on instead. Teethers can be helpful to relieve some of the discomforts of gum pain.

Limit soother use during the day

Research suggests that soother use shouldn't exceed six hours per day.⁸

Make and follow a consistent plan on soother use. Consider questions like „in what situations do I want to offer my baby a soother?“, „when and where should I proactively offer them a soother?“, „what should I do to learn how to get a breastfed baby to take a soother?“, and „when do I wish to start weaning my baby from his or her soother?“

These questions can help you stick to a plan from the beginning and encourage safe, responsible soother use.

■ 4. When should I not use a soother?

When your baby is hungry: never use a soother to replace or delay a feed.

Try to recognise your baby's feeding cues right away. It may seem difficult at first but you'll soon be a pro! The worst time to begin feeding is when your baby is already fussy and crying. It's generally preferred to start feeding your little one when he or she is in a quiet, alert state and shows only early signs of hunger, such as opening their mouth, sucking on their hand, rooting around, and moving their arms and legs.¹¹

If you offer your baby the soother when they're hungry, your little one might delay or even miss a feed. This could impact your breast milk production and eventually cause your baby to cry, fuss, and show late hunger signs, as their hunger is not alleviated.

If your baby is showing signs of an ear infection.

There has been some evidence that the use of a soother could increase the risk of ear infections – acute otitis media (AOM). Sucking on a soother may create a pressure difference which prevents fluid from draining through the tube that connects the middle ear to the back of the nose and throat. This could lead to a bacterial infection. If your baby has frequent ear infections, it is therefore recommended to reduce or eliminate the use of a soother beyond six months of age to help avoid a possible recurrence of AOM.¹²



■ 5. When should my baby stop using the soother?

Recommendations around when to stop using the soother vary greatly. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends that weaning should start at the latest by 3 years of age.⁹ Many children stop using the soother on their own or when they start regularly eating solid foods, though others have strong desires to suck for a longer time.

Goodbye Soother!

How and when to wean your baby from the soother?



Eventually, the time comes when you decide to stop using the soother. Some children have no problem giving up their soothers – and may have already begun self-weaning from them – while others need more time to adjust. It may require patience and understanding to help your little one say goodbye. Here are some helpful tips to ease your little one's journey without their soother.

1. Take your time to prepare your little one for this big step

Prepare your child slowly and gently as it comes time to say goodbye to their soother. Goodbyes are never easy. Depending on your child's age, you may wish to talk with them and decide on a farewell plan together. It may be important for him or her to have a say in the decision, feel that you are supportive of them and that you are acknowledging their effort and feelings. A child should never be forced to give up the soother by punishment or humiliation.

Plant the seed

When you think your little one might be ready to stop using their soother, make a plan and stick to it. Start talking about weaning from the soother well in advance, so your child has ample time to get used to the idea and you can gradually begin reducing soother use.

Read together

Reading with your little one can be very precious. It's an opportunity to talk with your child about many things and spend time together. There are beautiful children's picture books that encourage a child, in an age-appropriate way, to stop using their soother. This can prepare them and help them to understand it's time to say goodbye.

Out of sight, out of mind

It can be helpful if your little one doesn't always see or have access to the soother. This prevents them from constantly being reminded that it's there and wanting to use it. Put the soother away when it isn't needed and offer it only in limited situations such as illness or in a difficult or painful moment, like receiving vaccinations or travelling on an airplane.

Take things day by day and step by step

Start with small steps and gradually encourage less soother use, day by day. For example, let your little one use their soother only at naptime or in the evenings to help them fall asleep – and then progressively decrease the daily amount of time he or she is using their soother.

Be wary of poor timing

Don't start weaning your child from their soother if they are facing a stressful situation or major life event, such as welcoming a sibling, travelling, moving to a new home or bedroom, being sick or experiencing a major change within the family like separation or divorce. It's best to choose a calm, non-stressful period to begin weaning your little one from the soother.



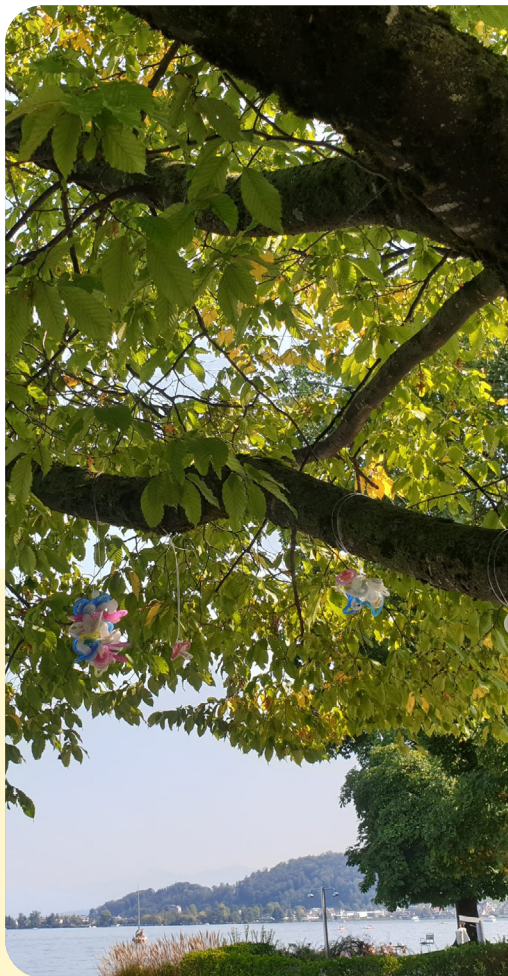
■ 2. Consider a farewell ritual to say goodbye to the soother

Soother tree

Ask a friend or relative whether you may hang the last soothers on a tree in their garden. Visit this friend or relative together with your child and hang the soother on a tree branch. There may be a tree in your community that is used to help children to say goodbye to their soothers. This symbolic act can help your little one better understand the finality of saying goodbye. Plan a fun activity afterwards to celebrate this milestone together!

Soother fairy

Have you ever heard of the soother fairy? She comes and takes the soother away when no one is looking. Talk to your child and plan a time when they are ready to invite the fairy to come. Let your child choose a place where to leave the soothers for the soother fairy who comes and takes them away. You could also wrap it up in a pretty package for the fairy. Tell your little one that the fairy – much like the tooth fairy – comes overnight and/or in the morning and leaves a little surprise gift in their place! Just ensure there are no other soothers anywhere still in your home.



■ 3. Help your little one go through the journey

Stay firm and supportive

After agreeing to take the soother away, your little one may still have a difficult time getting used to this new situation. They may ask for the soother (and probably will) and might even cry for it.



Do your best to remain firm and don't give in while staying supportive, comforting, and reminding them of your agreed-upon decision. It's never easy to say goodbye, so remember to have patience with your little one as they express their feelings. Have a cuddle with him or her, give them a relaxing massage, or play some comforting music to ensure a calming environment.

Prepare to help your little one through this phase

Consider how you'll react and respond to your little one when they complain or cry for their soother. For some children, the weaning process is difficult and they may

protest. Listen to your child as they express their feelings and support them at all times. You can help him or her cope by giving them extra hugs, attention, and playtime. Eventually, the complaining will decrease as your little one becomes more accustomed to the transition!

Distract your little one

If your little one asks to use their soother, you can try distracting them with games, more cuddling, playtime or reading books together.

Remember, what works for one child may not work for another. Children are their own little people and are developing their own personalities, likes and dislikes. You may even have completely different soother experiences from one of your children to another!

What is always true, however, is that you know your little one best, you've been doing a great job building a loving, everlasting bond together – that includes joyful moments and the difficult ones. Like your little one's other milestones, you'll go through this together as part of the journey.

Be sure to praise your little one when they give up their soother. Tell him or her how proud you are of what they did and acknowledge that it's a big developmental step. And, of course, be sure to lavish a lot of hugs and cuddles on your little one throughout the process!

In love we grow.

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