
REMINDER TECHNIQUES TO HELP YOUR CHILD

Once your child has made a decision to take responsibility for his/her sucking problem, you can use the following methods to help. In general, bitter-tasting fluids don't work well because they wear off quickly, and do not provide physical disruption.

1. Increase your child's motivation by using the attached chart to track daily progress. Agree on a simple reward to be earned if a certain number of night (for example 20) are "no-thumbs" (see page 2)
2. Use a reminder technique such as attaching a piece of folded napkin under a Band-Aid to the thumb, another variation is to tape a piece of a wooden Popsicle stick to the thumb.
3. Other reminder techniques include taping a light sock over the favorite hand at nighttime, or even using a sock to make a puppet to be worn.
4. Orthodontic retainers or appliances can be constructed with a wire loop resting in the roof of the mouth. These appliances expand the upper jaw structure as well as serve as a reminder device.

FURTHER QUESTIONS ABOUT FINGER SUCKING

Why do some preschoolers continue finger-sucking? The prevalence of sucking habits is fairly high in this age group - between 30% - 50%. The child at this age derives little actual gratification from sucking, but continues out of habit. Quitting a thumb-sucking habit is similar to an adult giving up smoking, nail biting, or over-eating. The uncomfortable feeling that something is missing is the greatest obstacle to quitting.

What should be done about older children or teens that still have a sucking habit? Because finger-sucking beyond the age of six can result in a poor bite and speech difficulties, the child should be encouraged to make a decision to quit. Finger-sucking does not serve any psychological need, nor is it indicative of any psychological disturbance. It is simply a habit, but one that can cause severe bite imbalances.

Strict, authoritarian approaches by the parent tend to backfire by causing the child to rebel. Permissiveness, on the other hand, does not give the child enough encouragement to break a comfortable habit. First, ensure that the child has made a firm decision to give up the habit, and use the following chart to track progress.

NO-THUMBS CHART

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Week 1							
Week 2							
Week 3							
Week 4							
Week 5							
Week 6							
Week 7							

EACH STAR MEANS I MADE IT THROUGH THE NIGHT WITH “NO THUMBS”!!

THIS IS THE DEAL WE’VE MADE

If I can sleep _____ nights within the next _____ weeks WITHOUT SUCKING MY THUMB, I will earn

_____.

Signed: Child _____.

Signed: Parent _____.

NOTE: The younger the child, the more frequent the rewards will need to be. Start off with a goal of 3-7 nights, and eventually increase to 20 or 30 nights. Suggested rewards include a toy, a movie, a book, or money.

REFERENCE: “David Decides About Thumb Sucking”, by Susan M. Heitler, Ph.D, Published by Reading matters, Box 300309, Denver, Colorado 80203

FACTS ABOUT FINGER-SUCKING

Sucking is a normal behavior for infants and toddlers, and is essentially harmless prior to age 5. Infant sucking behavior can be directed by the parent towards bottle-feeding, breast feeding, pacifiers, or a finger. Aide: Bottle-feeding apart from the baby's meal times should always be with water to prevent infant tooth decay due to sugars in milk and juice.

After age six, when the front permanent teeth begin to come in, continued finger-sucking can cause the upper teeth to flair forward, resulting in an unattractive overbite. Finger pressure from the habit also causes an open-bite space between the upper and lower teeth, which can impair speech and chewing ability.

Prior to age 5, many children do not have the maturity or desire to make a firm decision to quit their habit. A good time to encourage your child to make a decision to quit is at age 5 or 6. Like any habit, finger-sucking is difficult to give up, even if the child is motivated to do so. Have a discussion about the habit to help your child make his or her own decision to quit. Use the following questions to assess your child's motivation level. Even at age 5, some children do not yet have the maturity needed to quit. If you find this to be the case, drop the subject and bring up the discussion again after four to six months.

EXAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- "You're in the second grade now, and getting to be a big kid. What do you think about deciding to quit thumb sucking?"
- "Do you know any older friends, brothers, or sisters who used to suck their thumbs? How did they quit?"
- "Do you think finger sucking is better for babies or grown kids?"
- "Would you like your friends to see you sucking your thumb?"
- "If I were to give you some help to make quitting easier, when would you like to stop your habit?"
- "Quitting your habit is mostly up to you. Are you ready to try very hard to stop?"
- "When is your favorite time to suck your fingers?"
- **For ages 7 or older:** "Lots of kids have braces or Invisalign, but did you know that your treatment will take longer if you continue to suck your thumb?"