


# THUMB SUCKING & PACIFIERS



## STRIKING OUT BAD HABITS


Did you know that when a child sucks on a thumb, fingers, or pacifier, it can negatively impact their dental health? While it is common for little ones to suck their thumbs, prolonged thumb sucking and pacifier use can cause orthodontic problems such as open bites, crossbites, and flared front teeth.

### First Steps To Changing Habits



Limit thumb sucking or pacifier use to **bedtime only**, or when your child is upset.

#### 1. ADD SOME LIMITATIONS TO THE HABIT:



**Do not** allow your child to **carry the pacifier around in their mouth** when they are playing or watching TV.

#### 2. MAKE IT FUN:

- Remember that positively reinforcing the habits you want is a great way to encourage kids as they give up their old habits.
- Check out some specific ideas on the other side



If your child only engages in the habit when they have a special blanket or stuffed animal with them, try to **remove the comfort item**.

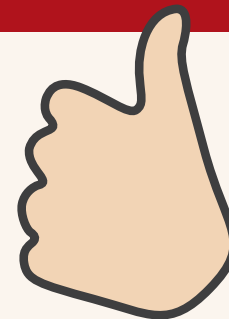
*grandslamsmiles.com*

## Practicing for Grand Slam Smiles

Practice strategy for at least 6 weeks before giving up or switching to a new strategy. These are hard habits to break, and it takes time.

### Thumb and Finger Sucking

Use a sticker chart to track progress. If your child is able to go a period of time without sucking his/her thumb or finger, he/she can earn a sticker. After a certain number of stickers, he/she may earn a special outing or present. Earlier in the process, some children may need to earn multiple stickers per day to keep the motivation up. As time progresses, you can work towards longer intervals. You know your child. Think about what would motivate them. Check out **grandslamsmiles.com** for a free printable calendar!



Put a band-aid on your child's thumb or finger every morning to help him/her remember not to suck it. We recommend using this only during the waking hours to prevent accidentally swallowing the band-aid while asleep. Pick out fun band-aids at the store together!

Try the T-guard or Finger guard, a plastic case that covers the thumb or finger and has a bracelet so it cannot easily be removed. This can be ordered online.

Try Mavala Stop, a bitter tasting liquid which is painted on the thumb or finger. This is not meant to be punishment but a gentle reminder.

If these strategies don't work, talk with your dentist about an orthodontic appliance. These appliances are usually only used when a child is ready to stop but is having a hard time with other strategies.

### Pacifier Use

Start by limiting use to nap time and bedtime only, or when your child is upset.

Leave the pacifier for the "Pacifier Fairy." We hear she leaves fun surprises!

Cut the nipple over time, making it shorter and shorter. (Note: make sure that the pacifier is in one piece and not a choking hazard.)

Take the pacifier to Build a Bear and put it inside!

Leave the pacifier for Santa Claus to take to the baby elves, or the stork to give to the new baby sibling!

Cut it out cold turkey. Most children have a few rough nights but adjust better than parents think.

