

Neonatal service

Dummies on the neonatal unit

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

During your baby's stay on the neonatal unit, we may suggest giving your baby a dummy to suck on. This leaflet explains about dummies and their use on the unit. If you have any questions, please ask the nurse looking after your baby.

Why do we use dummies on the neonatal unit?

1. Make the most of nasal CPAP beathing support

If your baby's breathing is being supported using continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) through small tubes in their nose, sucking on a dummy will help to stop the air coming back out of the mouth. This may make the delivery of the nasal CPAP more effective.

2. To provide comfort

One reason babies suck is to comfort and calm themselves. Positioning a baby so they can get their hand or fingers near their mouth to suck on, or offering a dummy, helps your baby use this reflex to calm themself.

3. To provide support for uncomfortable procedures

Sucking on a dummy can provide comfort to a baby during an uncomfortable procedure. We know that sweet tastes may also be effective way of providing comfort. This is why we can also use mum's expressed breast milk, or a special sugar solution called *Sweet-Ease*[™] along with a dummy to provide comfort for your baby during uncomfortable procedures.

4. To help promote sucking and build an association between sucking and feeding

Your baby may not be ready to co-ordinate sucking with swallowing and breathing at first. They may not suck their feeds straight from birth but will instead receive milk through a tube. Using a dummy when your baby is awake and having a milk feed through a naso-gastric tube helps encourage sucking. It encourages your baby to link sucking with having a full tummy.

If your baby is unable to suck feed for any other reason, using a dummy will help give positive oral experiences. This may help your baby with their future feeding development.

What kind of dummies do we use?

We have two different size dummies available:

- the purple one for smaller babies 32 weeks and below
- the green one for bigger babies 33 weeks and above

Does using a dummy mean my baby won't breastfeed?

You may have been told that babies may become confused if they are offered an artificial teat before you and your baby are comfortable with breastfeeding. This is because it is a different sucking technique and may cause 'nipple teat confusion'.

The issues are different for term and preterm babies.

For term babies

It does seem to be true that using a dummy to settle a healthy term baby back to sleep in the early days before you and your baby are comfortable with breastfeeding may mean they feed less often than they need to. This may mean a mother might not make enough milk to feed her baby.

In these early days, the more a baby feeds, the more milk a mother will produce. If a baby does not feed regularly then breastfeeding may not be successful, as a mother may not have enough milk. Feeding in response to a baby's cues is very important in these early days.

For preterm babies

For mothers and babies on the neonatal unit, learning to feed can take time and looks different.

We will support you to express your milk frequently. This will help you produce a good milk supply to be able to meet all your baby's nutritional needs when they are ready to breastfeed.

For the premature baby:

- there are known benefits for the type of dummy use described
- there is no evidence from current literature or our experience to suggest dummies interfere with breastfeeding in preterm babies. Babies who use a dummy can and do go on to breastfeed once they are mature enough to do so

As your baby is moved from tube to breastfeeding, we will gradually reduce the amount they use the dummy. Ideally, they will not be using a dummy when going home from the hospital.

If you have any questions, please ask one of the nurses or a speech and language therapist to talk to you about it more.

When to stop using a dummy?

Offer your baby the breast or bottle when they show feeding readiness cues, such as:

- waking
- rooting
- licking
- sucking

Your nurse will help you to recognise when your baby is ready.

We should begin to reduce dummy use at this stage. It is important not to give your baby a dummy instead of offering the breast or bottle.

We can still use the dummy to calm your baby for painful or stressful procedures.

It's important that your baby uses a dummy at feed times if they are unable to take suck feeds. For example, this may be because their gut is not yet able to tolerate milk.

Once your baby has become comfortable with suck feeding you may choose to keep using the dummy for comfort purposes and to settle to sleep. This is entirely up to you.

Babies over 8 months

Constant use of a dummy for a long time in a baby over 8 months of age may affect their teeth and speech and language development.

This is when babies begin to babble. So, reducing dummy use will give these skills a chance to develop. This is important. Try to wean your baby off their dummy by this age.

General guidelines for using dummies:

- clean the dummy once a day. Wash it in hot water with washing up liquid and then steam sterilise in the microwave. Your baby's nurse will guide you
- check the dummy before each use. If the dummy shows signs of wear and tear, replace it
- when your baby has left the neonatal unit, please do not dip the dummy into something sweet before giving it to your baby. This can potentially cause tooth decay

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:
imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk

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