And another thing!

A diatribe on dummies

One either hates or likes soothers, dummies, or pacifiers. Their use is widespread and seems to have become semi-automatic, semi-epidemic, and semi-prescriptive. A pacifier is defined as a rubber object that a baby is given to suck so that the baby feels comforted and stays quiet. Their manufacture is covered by the British Standard Number BS5239.

I do not like dummies. My objections are on aesthetic grounds: constant dummy use makes infants and toddlers look distant, dull, glazed, sometimes semi-hypnotised; on hygienic grounds: they are associated with mouth infections (I have often seen parents lift a dropped dummy from a dirty floor, lick it, and place it in the toddler’s mouth); on orthodontic grounds: their use is a manifest cause of dental malocclusion, overbite, and loss of primary incisors; on freedom of speech grounds: it must surely be easier to babble and jargonise without a foreign body constantly placed in one’s mouth; and on the belief that dummies are on aesthetic grounds: constant sucker? Is this non-nutritive sucking a symptom of breast milk bankruptcy? Are babies better sucking their own thumbs, fingers, or wrists? The downsides and benefits are listed below.

The soothers industry is a reasonably lucrative one. My local pharmacy appears to do a considerable trade in these foreign bodies. Soothers do not appear to have been used before the twentieth century, presumably as rubber and plastic are products of that century. My observations would suggest that their use is becoming more prevalent in Britain and Ireland.

I have no difficulty with parents who use sucking/soothing to settle infants/toddlers to sleep in the first/second year of life. I have great objection to prolonged daytime dummy use in toddlers who are awake. Indeed, one meets toddlers who seem “addicted” to dummies and who suck simply non-stop. Such toddlers are usually prolonged bottle feeders and likely to be pushed in buggies up to the age of 4 or 5 years. The “experts” (Jolly, Lecch, Green, et al) are against dummies in principle, but recognise that in practice they can be soothing. They recommend occasional use and give inconsistent advice on withdrawal.

Are any paediatric colleagues willing to campaign to “Drive out Dummies OK (DODO)” or “Ban Day Oral Pacifiers OK (BDOP)?” Out of the mouths of babes, remove dummies! (fig 1)

A contrary view is that the dummy is pacifying. It keeps them quiet. It stops them crying. Peaceful, quiet, constant, non-nutritive sucking. What harm does it do? Don’t they all grow out of it? Did it do any harm to the other children? Surely don’t they like it?

No thanks — I’m trying to give them up!!

REFERENCES


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