

# Habits

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## What is the problem?

Habits that involve placing fingers or objects in the mouth can lead to movement of the teeth and unfavourable growth of the jaws. In some cases, there may also be damage to the teeth and roots. If a finger is involved the front teeth can stick-out and depress into the bone, whilst the back teeth can move into a crossbite. Biting your nails can damage the enamel of the teeth. The extent of the damage depends on the duration, frequency, and intensity of the habit.

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## What sort of habits?

Sucking on a finger, or an object. Biting your nails.

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## Why do children have habits

A child may develop a habit in early life because it provides comfort or pleasure. In some cases, the habit may be related to tiredness and in extreme situations it may related to a more serious psychological problem.

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## Age

Habits tend to have a smaller impact if they are stopped before the age of seven and the side effects will sometimes correct on their own. It is important to try and break the habit in order to avoid complicated Orthodontic treatment later. Orthodontic treatment is usually offered only after the habit is stopped.

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## What about dummies (pacifiers)

Orthodontic dummies are highly recommended for babies because they keep the airway open and reduce the risk of cot death. Additionally, children who take up a dummy will tend to willingly quit at age four to six and not have a digit habit instead. It is important not to dip the dummy in a sugary drink to encourage babies to use it as it may cause tooth decay. It is very common to hear that a child with a digit habit was not given a pacifier as a baby.

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## How to treat a digit habit

There are a number of approaches that we recommend.

Firstly, the motivational route by using a chart that is sold at various retailers such as the Early Learning Centre. The child is rewarded with time for reducing the frequency and then stopping the habit. We do not recommend scolding and punishment.

A product such as Stop'N' Grow can be painted on the nail of the offensive finger and this will make the experience of sucking the finger unpleasant.

And finally, the Orthodontist can fit a special appliance called a Habit Breaker to stop the child from resting the finger on the gums behind the teeth. This appliance is usually left in place for a year and



Habit Breaker