

THAMES VALLEY & WESSEX NEONATAL OPERATIONAL DELIVERY NETWORK

Thames Valley & Wessex Pathway

Non-Nutritive Sucking: Information for parent's



Non-Nutritive Sucking

- Non-nutritive sucking (NNS) is allowing a baby to suck without taking in milk. This is best done at the breast after the milk has been expressed, but if this is not possible then using a dummy/pacifier may help.
- A baby has a natural instinct to suck and it is important for your preterm or ill baby to have the opportunity to suck on his fingers, or a dummy, when you are not available in order to practise for the real thing!
- If you are intending to bottle feed NNS provides an opportunity for your baby to develop his/her sucking skills before he/she is old enough or well enough to have a bottle feed.

Is Non-Nutritive Sucking Useful?

Research has shown that the use of a dummy in a Neonatal Unit can have the following advantages.

- It reduces the experience of pain.

By offering non-nutritive sucking to your baby before, during and after a procedure, such as having a blood sample taken, we can reduce the amount of stress your baby experiences. Other methods used to console a baby are containment holding, rocking, skin to skin contact and breast feeding. All these methods can be used during painful procedures to minimise the distress your baby may experience.

- It encourages sucking and weight gain.

Your baby may be being fed through a tube as he/she may not be ready to take all his/her feeds by himself/herself. By offering an expressed breast or a dummy during this time your baby will associate sucking with a feeling of a full tummy. Babies gain weight quicker by doing this and have an easier transition to oral feeding and a shorter stay in hospital.

- It helps with breathing.

Babies receiving help with breathing are more stable if they are allowed to suckle on a dummy. Babies who require oxygen have improved oxygenation during tube feeds if partaking in NNS.

Will the use of a dummy lead to pacifier preference?

By using NNS when a baby wants to suck, during tube feeding and painful procedures the benefits for babies far outweigh any disadvantages that there might be, however, whether you use a dummy or not is your decision.

There used to be a concern that babies may not establish breastfeeding well, if they are asked to swap between sucking on a breast and a bottle teat or pacifier. However, this is now felt by professionals, not to be a problem for most babies.

Also, when a baby does NNS there is no transfer of milk, and as yet no research to show that there is any confusion experienced by babies receiving NNS. By continuing to express whilst waiting for oral feeding to be established you can ensure that you will have adequate milk for when your baby is ready to feed at the breast.

One possible disadvantage may be, that your baby's signals that they are ready for a sucking feed could be misinterpreted and NNS offered, however, the team will help to support you with this.

Choosing to give your baby a dummy?

In all, but a very few exceptional cases, your permission will be sought before giving your baby a dummy.

- Your baby's dummy will be kept in a named pot next to his incubator/cot. The nursing staff will tell you how to keep it clean and hygienic, as this varies according to the hygiene rules in your hospital.
- Your baby can suck on a dummy for a few minutes before and then during an uncomfortable procedure and until he/she is in a calm and relaxed state again.
- During tube feeding time allow your baby to suck on a dummy for a few minutes prior to a feed, during, and after the feed for a short time.
- Brush the dummy against your baby's top lip; if he/she wants to suck, he/she will open his/her mouth. Place the dummy on top of his/her tongue and hold it in place until he/she has a strong suck.
- Your baby will probably spit the dummy out when he/she no longer needs it, in which case it should be stored in his/her pot of.
- As your baby starts to feed the needs for a dummy will decrease. Once full breast or bottle feeds are achieved your baby should be content and settled and the dummy can be removed completely if you wish.

Reducing the risk of Sudden Infant Death by use of dummies

- A number of research studies have shown that if a baby routinely uses a dummy their risk of sudden infant death (SID) is lowered.
- This has led some parents to offer their baby a dummy every time they are settling the baby to sleep.
- It is not currently clear how using a dummy has this beneficial effect, and the evidence for it is not strong. There is also concern that infants are at greater risk of SIDS if they usually use a dummy, but have not been given their dummy on a particular night.
- The NHS website and Lullaby Trust current advice is;
 - It is possible that giving a dummy at the start of sleep reduces the risk of SIDS.
 - If you do choose to use a dummy for the purpose of reducing SID, don't start until breastfeeding is well established, usually around 1 month of age.
 - If a baby uses a dummy as part of their routine, it should be given for every sleep period.
 - Gently withdraw use of a dummy between 6-12 months of age, before possible adverse effects (otitis media, dental malocclusion) occur.
 - Do not force the baby to take a dummy or put it back in if the baby spits it out.
 - Don't use a neck cord to attach the dummy to the baby, and do not put anything sweet on the dummy.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the use of non-nutritive sucking and dummies please ask a member of staff.

Thank you

Parent Information Booklet compiled by:
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