

Chapter 37: Sucking of Thumbs

It is the common habit of small children that they suck their thumbs. Generally at three months age the babies commence thumb sucking and keep doing it for some time. The natural cause of this habit can be the breast-feeding of the baby. When it is hungry it either suckles the breast of the mother or the rubber-soothers.

The child feels that sucking gives it comfort and over a time learns that it can suck its thumb when the mother's breast is not available to it. This is a part of the learning process of the child. It detects the usefulness of sucking its thumb and gets used to the habit.

This habit comes handy to the child when it is hungry and the feed is not available to it; also it can allude to thumb sucking if it has any feeling of discomfort. Many parents think that thumb sucking is not a good habit and devise ways of stopping the child from doing it. Here it must be mentioned that orthodontists consider thumb sucking adversely affects the natural configuration of teeth and the mouth, many dentists and doctors have felt that thumb sucking in children is not so harmful.

One expert says:

"Many psychologists and pediatricians opine that thumb sucking habit in children is not harmful in any way and in most instances it doesn't become the cause of any defect in the mouths. They also observe that this habit tapers off automatically once the child has set its milk teeth."¹

But, nevertheless it is possible that this habit might cause some health problems because generally the child's fingers are exposed to the atmosphere and might carry some infectious material into the mouth. Most parents therefore don't want their child to get into the habit of thumb sucking.

Apparently this habit of thumb sucking is not a serious problem and if a child gets used to it, the habit will leave him as he grows up. But if the parents want, they can take steps to see that the child does not get into the habit at the initial stages. Preventing a child from the habit of thumb sucking is far easier than stopping it after it has got habituated.

When the parents initially notice the tendency of thumb sucking in the child, they should try to find the

reason, give it more milk if its hunger is not satiated, and if it gets hungry between the feeding schedule give it some fruit juice or biscuit. But if the reason for thumb sucking is some discomfort, it must be properly investigated and remedy found. If the child gets into the habit of thumb sucking despite all the preventive steps, then it will be difficult to check the habit.

Another method of checking this habit in children is to provide them with good and soft toys with a view to divert their mind from thumb sucking. If the child is provided company of some other child to play with, it might not suck the thumb during the time they are at play. The other alternative tool for avoiding thumb sucking is to give the child a rubber-soother to suck. But here too there will be a chance of the child getting habituated to the tool for a period of time.

However, the parents have to practice patience and restraint in checking this habit in children and they should not have recourse to punishing the child to the detriment of its psyche. The parents should bear in mind that however strong the habit of thumb sucking in a child, it will leave him by about four or five years of age.

[1.](#) Ruwan shinashi kudak, p. 172

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/principles-upbringing-children-ibrahim-amini/chapter-37-sucking-thumbs#comment-0>