

Thumb or finger sucking is a common sight among children; however, no one is really sure how it originates.

Although not considered a serious problem by many as far as habits are concerned, if thumb or finger sucking persists longer than it should, some not-so-pleasant problems develop.

The best time to break the habit is before the permanent teeth grow in, around the age of 5 or 6. Otherwise, thumb or finger sucking can speed up the growth of the upper jaw, slow down the growth of the lower jaw, and cause improper alignment of the teeth.

Other problems may also develop. Constant pressure by the thumb or fingers can cause a high narrow palate, early loss of baby teeth, abnormal swallowing patterns, improper tongue position, and speech problems.

Contrary to popular belief, breaking a chronic finger or thumbsucking habit does not cause emotional trauma. Some methods of ending this habit are better than others.

A theory that has proven to be at least 90 percent effective is known as behavioral modification. Rather than using an appliance (negative reinforcement) to rid a person of the thumb or finger sucking habit, positive reinforcement establishes self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment. In a sense, the therapy creates self-satisfaction to replace the thumb or finger sucking desire.

Once the habit is gone, the child gains many benefits. He or she enjoys an improved appearance, an ability to speak more clearly, and better dental health. In breaking the unwanted habit, the child will also receive a boost in self-confidence. It's true: breaking a habit is a good rule of thumb.

Contact our office at (847) 505-6110 or email
Connieomtchicago@gmail.com

Common Problems Associated With Thumbsucking



Improper alignment of the teeth can be caused by thumb or finger sucking.



It is best to break the thumbsucking habit before the age of 5 or 6.



Constant pressure exerted by the thumb or fingers during sucking can cause a high narrow palate.



Connie Izquierdo M.A. CCC-SLP, COM

For nearly three decades, Connie has been serving the North Shore as a Certified and Licensed Speech Pathologist and Orofacial Myologist. With over 25 years of clinical experience in Pediatric Speech-Language Pathology, she has worked extensively with

children presenting a wide range of speech, language, and orofacial myofunctional disorders. Connie is the founder of *Interactive Speech Associates, Inc.*, a private practice located in downtown Wilmette. Connie provides services to children ages birth to 18 years of age in the areas of Orofacial Myofunctional Therapy, Thumb Sucking/Pacifier Elimination, Articulation, Expressive and Receptive Communication, Stuttering, Infant and Toddler Feeding, Breastfeeding Support, Reading Remediation, and Handwriting Support. Connie is dedicated to professional growth and stays current with the latest research in speech-language pathology and orofacial myology.

Contact *Interactive Speech Associates, Inc.*, at:

1131 Central Ave, Wilmette, IL 60091
(847) 505-6110

Connieomtchicago@gmail.com



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American
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Association

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Connie Izquierdo, M.A. CCC-SLP, COM
Certified Speech Pathologist
Certified Orofacial Myologist

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Wilmette, IL 60091

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