



**ORAL HEALTH KANSAS**

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## Tips and Tricks: **Thumbsucking** **- Kicking the Habit**



Many babies begin to suck their fingers or thumbs before they are even born. A baby's sucking needs vary widely, beginning as early as 9 months and lasting from 18-36 months. Most experts suggest that sucking habits should be stopped between the ages of 2 to 3 years. Trying to stop when a child isn't ready can be frustrating, but when it is time, here are some strategies to try.



- Usually sucking habits will stop on their own. Harsh words, teasing, or punishment may upset the child and is not an effective way to get rid of habits.
- Praise and reward the child when not sucking a thumb.
- Star charts, daily rewards, and gentle reminders, especially during the day, are also very helpful.
- Put a sock, mitten or bandage on the thumb as a reminder for the child. Commercial options, such as the TGuard shown at left, are also available.
- Involve an older child in choosing the method of stopping.
- Provide stuffed animal or another comfort object.
- A child's dentist can offer encouragement to the child and explain what could happen to their teeth if they do not stop sucking.
- Find activities that keep the child's fingers busy as a substitute for sucking. Remember, many children suck out of boredom.
- Children often suck their thumbs when feeling insecure or needing comfort. Focus on correcting the cause of the anxiety and provide comfort to the child.
- Your dentist can make an appliance for the mouth that discourages thumb sucking or prescribe a bitter medication to coat the thumb.
- Your medical or dental professional may have other ideas.