



## THUMB SUCKING - STOP IT EARLY

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### Interviews Welcomed

(Madison, WI, Feb 1, 1999) – February is National Children’s Dental Health Month and the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD) is offering parents some helpful hints on how to help their children avoid permanent structural dental problems which could eventually require cosmetic treatment.

The habit of thumb or finger sucking is one to watch. “Many kids suck their thumb or finger at some time or another,” says Joe Carrick, DDS and AACD president. But when should a child stop sucking their thumb or finger?

According to Dr. Carrick, “If a child stops sucking their thumb or finger by the age of three or four, they are in good shape. They will not have caused any permanent damage. Thumb sucking for a prolonged period of time can cause permanent damage and affects ten to twenty percent of the population. If a child is still sucking their thumb or finger at eight to twelve years of age, there will most likely be a need for active orthodontic treatment, such as braces.”

Signs of a child becoming too attached to sucking a digit includes calluses on the finger or thumb being sucked, tongue thrusting forward when swallowing, and speech problems, such as lisping.

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Permanent effects of thumb or finger sucking include narrowing of the upper jaw and crowding of the lower teeth which can delay or alter the eruption of the incisors at age six to seven years. Other permanent effects are flared upper front teeth, prevention of the nose from growing down (and so is tipped up), crossbite and altered facial growth, plus speech problems.

Thumb or finger sucking also causes a problem for children learning to swallow correctly. The tongue plays a major role in swallowing. "For people who don't suck their thumb or finger, their tongue goes up behind the roof of their mouth as they swallow and this causes a seal. But, when trying to swallow while sucking the thumb or finger, the tongue is thrust forward, in between the front teeth. This action makes swallowing difficult and will require re-training to correct the tongue movement."

It is important to detect potential problems early, not only to assist with a child's structural dental development but their emotional nurturing as well. "The skeletal deformities which can develop can lead to insecurities and self-image problems, particularly in children. These should be intercepted and corrected as early as possible, both for the psychological and physical health of the child," advises Ken Zakariasen, DDS and AACD executive director.

If a parent suspects their child may be developing a habit, which could result in permanent dental problems and require cosmetic procedures to correct, they should consult with their dentist. There are four thousand AACD member dentists throughout the United States. For information about cosmetic dentistry or local cosmetic dentists, contact the AACD at 800-543-9220, or online at [www.aacd.com](http://www.aacd.com).

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