

An update on non-nutritive sucking habit cessation

Précis: This narrative review presents the evidence-based techniques available to manage non-nutritive sucking habits in children in general practice.

Abstract

Statement of the problem: Non-nutritive sucking habits (NNSH) encompass a variety of comforting behaviours in children. While considered normal in early childhood, the persistence of these habits has the potential to cause adverse effects on dental and skeletal relationships in the permanent dentition. Several interceptive techniques to promote habit cessation have been recommended.

Purpose of the review: To update the dental practitioner on techniques recommended for cessation of NNSH in children and evidence of their efficacy.

Discussion: There are various interventions for NNSH cessation, including pacifier substitution, behavioural modification, orthodontic appliances, or aversive therapy. Psychological interventions were more likely to stop NNSH versus no treatment in the short and long term. Appliances were shown to be effective in stopping NNSH and demonstrated favourable effects on occlusion. There was no difference between alternative behavioural techniques. While there is insufficient evidence in support of a single intervention, these techniques demonstrate success when used alone or in combination to promote the cessation of NNSH.

Conclusions: Creating awareness of the treatment options available for managing NNSH may allow practitioners to work with families to establish early habit intervention, with options individualised to the patient. Further high-quality studies are needed to strengthen the evidence base surrounding techniques available for NNSH cessation in general practice.

Journal of the Irish Dental Association February/March 2024;70(1):31-35