



The Dangers of Thumb Sucking



Thumbsucking past the age of 5 can cause long term problems.

Thumb sucking or finger sucking are common behaviours in babies and toddlers. They find comfort in the behaviour and use it to self-soothe. However, persistent thumb or finger sucking beyond a certain age can cause significant problems with your child's teeth and jaws.

Normally, with gentle encouragement, children naturally grow out of it this behaviour and quit the habit, but if they don't, here are some dangers of thumb sucking that can be resolved with orthodontics.

Teeth and Jaw Problems

Prolonged thumb or finger sucking can cause serious problems with your child's teeth and jaws that may require extensive orthodontic intervention later in life.

If this habit is not addressed early, these are just some of the problems that your child might face:

- ✓ Protruding Upper Front Teeth
- ✓ Open Bite
- ✓ Crossbite
- ✓ Depressed Incisors

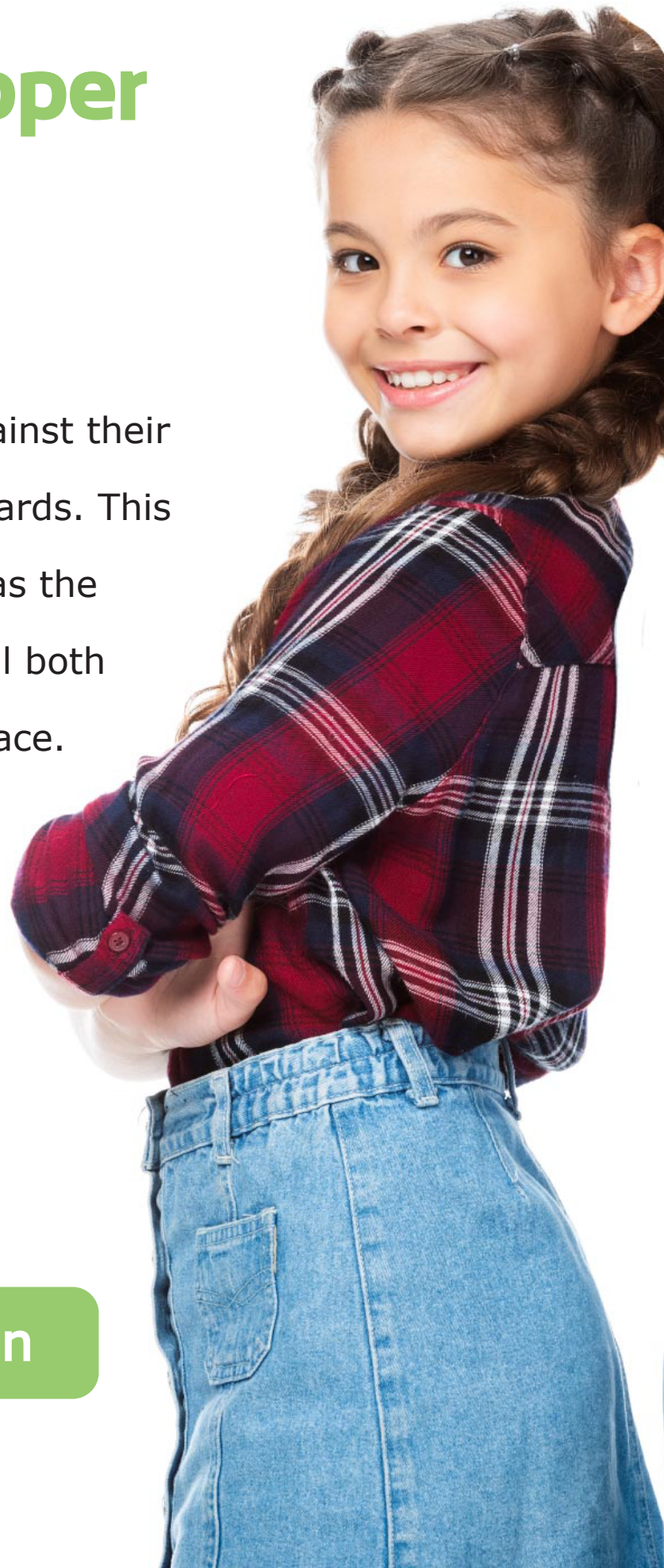


Protruding Upper Front Teeth

Children push their thumb against their top teeth, pushing them outwards. This may affect the teeth, as well as the formation of the jaw which will both develop protruding from the face.

Protruded teeth are easily broken or injured, leaving your child vulnerable during playtime or sports activities.

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Open Bite

Finger and thumb sucking does not allow your child's teeth from coming together in the front. As a result, the gap formed between the upper and lower front teeth may match the finger or thumb exactly.

Crossbite

The sucking motion causes the upper jaw to become too narrow, so the upper and lower teeth do not fit together properly causing a permanent crossbite.

Depressed Incisors

The pressure of the thumb or finger on the lower front teeth causes them to get pushed towards the tongue, which causes problems with speech and eating.

What Can Make The Damage Worse?

The severity of the problem depends on a few key factors. These factors are the age of the child, the intensity of the sucking motion, and the frequency of the behaviour.

Duration

It is common for young children to suck on their thumbs, fingers, and sometimes toes! There are almost no problems associated with this habit other than some minor tooth shifting. The problem arises when they continue this behaviour past the age of 5. After that age, the shape of the jaw and the alignment of the teeth will be affected.



Intensity

Some children suck on their fingers harder than others. The extra force can cause a lot more damage than those who only suck their digits mildly.

Frequency

Depending on how often your child sucks on their fingers, the damage may be severe or minimal. If it is less than an hour or 2 a day, your child may never have problems associated to the behavior, but if the behavior occurs all day long, the damage may be severe.

How Can You Stop the Behaviour?

Before you make an orthodontic appointment, you can try to curb the behaviour yourself.

Pacifiers

If your child is already older, this may not apply, but, for infants, try a pacifier. Pacifiers still cause damage in the long run; however, it is easier to phase out a pacifier than a thumb. You could just take away the pacifier.



Incentives

For older children, try positive encouragement. Explain the dangers to your child, offer rewards for attempts by your child to lessen the behavior, and provide deterrents such as nail polish or a band aid.

Avoid scolding or punishing your child. Children suck their thumb to soothe, and what better reason to soothe yourself than when someone is intimidating you. Also, it may encourage the child to use thumb sucking to receive negative attention.

Talk to An Orthodontist

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Distraction

Getting over a thumb or finger sucking habit is similar to getting over any addiction, it is stressful and difficult for your child. Your child will need lots of distractions and emotional support. Spend more time with them, get them a stuffy to help them through this difficult time, or find a common hobby to make the whole experience more positive.

We Can Help

If all else fails, your efforts came up empty and your child is still self-soothing using the finger or thumb sucking habit, then it may be time to speak to an orthodontist.

Orthodontists can offer an appliance that will usually stop the habit. The appliance is placed on the roof of the mouth, which changes the way it feels to have a finger or a thumb in the mouth. The appliance satisfies your child's urge to put a finger or thumb in their mouth



If the child continues the habit after the initial appliance is placed, an additional habit breaking guard may be helpful. The appliance must be worn for six to ten months to make sure that your child permanently stopped the habit. During this time, the orthodontist can make some corrective tooth movements with the appliance, if necessary.

Some children will try to remove the appliance to suck their finger or thumb. In that case, we may suggest an appliance that is cemented to the teeth.



Pure Orthodontics is a specialist clinic that specializes in orthodontic treatment such as braces, Invisalign, and Myo Functional Therapy.

If you would like to speak to an orthodontic specialist, you can book a free, no-obligation consultation at any of our locations in Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Leduc, and Red Deer.

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