

## Thumb-Sucking

Your child is involved with a natural and commonly occurring reflex, thumb-sucking. It is nearly impossible to restrict or limit the natural act in infancy, but it usually stops somewhere between two and four years of age. If thumb-sucking continues beyond age four, it should be discouraged.

What can you do if your child keeps thumb-sucking past age four? Several suggestions follow:

- Reason with the child about the potential harmful effects of long-term thumb-sucking, including development of cracked teeth and a poor bite. This approach works on some children.
- Reward the child when thumb-sucking is reduced.
- Make sure the child knows that he or she is loved and is in a secure situation. Less anxiety and fear leads to less thumb-sucking.
- Often, placing a sock, glove, or bandage on the hand to remind the child not to suck his/her thumb is successful. However, some children pull the reminder off and continue to suck.
- Placing a spicy or unpleasant-tasting solution on the thumbnail sometimes prevents the child from sucking his/her thumb.
- As a last resort, your dentist can make an appliance to place in the mouth that will discourage and potentially eliminate thumb-sucking.