



GOOD MOUTH GUIDE

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BABIES AND YOUNG TODDLERS LOVE TO PUT THINGS IN THEIR MOUTHS

Whether that's their own fist, your phone, or the dog's tail. But just to reassure you, this exploration of the world mouth-first is a completely normal – even beneficial – part of their development.

In our Good Mouth Guide, we're on a mission to help parents understand why your little one loves to mouth everything they can get their hands on, helping you to embrace it with confidence and peace of mind.

With this new exploration however comes a parent's concern for safety. We know there are some items that babies might try and put in their mouth which are dangerous, or choking hazards. That's why we'll share top tips for making your home a safe haven for discovery, along with ways to teach your baby or toddler what's OK to mouth – and what's not.

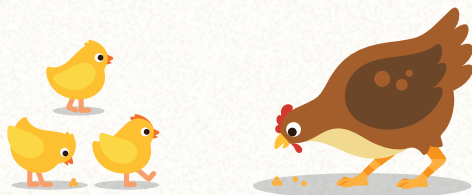
Mouthing helps babies learn about their environment, soothes them, and even prepares them for successful weaning on to solid foods (and I think we need all the help we can get with that!). It's a learning process that strengthens their muscles, aids in desensitising the gag reflex and has implications for their budding immune system.

With 90 years of experience in feeding babies, Heinz Family knows a thing or two about those early years. And we know how important giving your little one's immune system the right support wherever you can is to parents. That's why Heinz Family created its Immunity Support Pouches, with L Paracasei and Vitamin C.

Vitamin C supports the normal function of their immune systems, giving parents that little bit of extra reassurance just when they need it.

ENJOY, AND HAPPY MOUTHING!

Sarah



THE BEST EVERYDAY ITEMS (NON-FOOD, AND FOOD) FOR BABIES TO MOUTH, AND WHY



Their hands!

This is often how mouthing starts and babies have more control over where to put them, how far they go into the mouths.

Other body parts

Often the little gymnasts can chomp on their own feet!

A baby toothbrush

perfect for getting them used to having a toothbrush in their mouths even before teeth erupt.

Teethers

it's good to have a variety of textures and shapes to enhance exploration and learning. Look for ones made from natural rubber or food grade silicone that's BPA free.

A weaning spoon

these are often made from a warm, soft material like food grade silicone which is kind to irritated, teething-tastic gums.

Carrot sticks, sliced pepper, raw sugar snap peas or green beans

perfect for babies from 6 months, and contrary to popular belief these are not a choking risk till your baby can bite chunks off (which is usually when they have teeth).

Refrigerated veggie sticks

like cold cucumber can be soothing if your baby is mouthing in an attempt to relieve the dreaded teething pain.

DID YOU KNOW...

43% of parents we surveyed said their little one had tried to stuff a mobile phone in their mouth!



TOP TIPS FOR PARENTS TO FIND THE JOY IN MOUTHING

1. Rest assured that mouthing is an important and essential developmental milestone – even if it is a bit dribbly!
2. Baby-proof your house so that you don't need to worry so much about them picking up and mouthing foods or items that could be dangerous
3. Offer up foods for them to mouth, such as sweet potato cut into wedges and baked, strips of omelette, cubes of cheese, slow cooked casseroled meat like beef or lamb, banana cut lengthways, steamed broccoli florets, roasted parsnips (without honey)
4. Buy a variety of teething toys for your baby made from natural materials so that they can explore and enjoy lots of different textures safely – keep them in your change bag so you've got them handy to switch out for other, less safe items
5. Teach your baby what's appropriate and what's not, for example: "let's leave the dogs toy for the dog" while taking the item gently from them. You can do this from a young age – they'll get it eventually.

Avocado Toast

Ingredients:

Mobile phone cases

Crochet doily

Silicone spoons

Dish cloth



Q&A



Ice Cream Sundae

Ingredients: Baby pom-pom hat
Gloves Silicone coaster
Lanyard Measuring spoon

Why do little ones stick everything in their mouth?

It's mostly about learning. Babies' mouths have a lot of sensory receptors and so they can learn a lot about the world around them from these receptors. You'll notice that from around 4 months they are able to grab things with their whole fists and bring it up to their mouth, but they can't yet explore things with their fingertips. Using their mouths allows babies to understand the detail of the object before they have full use of their fingertips. Clever, huh?

Babies also put their hands and objects into their mouth in order to self-soothe. Again, it's because they don't have any other ways of soothing when they are very little, but sucking (as you probably know) is a very soothing activity for them which they will seek out when they feel uncomfortable, unwell, tired, and just generally out of sorts.

One of the more common reasons babies put things into their mouths is due to teething. When all of your teeth come through at once, it can be pretty uncomfortable. Biting down or putting pressure on those painful gums can feel quite nice to a teething baby.

Finally, mouthing objects prepares babies for eating. They're practising some of the skills they'll need later when it comes to advancing through the stages of weaning.

Is it safe?

Mouthing is completely normal and with safe-to-mouth items, it can also be a completely safe activity. It actually helps brain growth and learning and so we shouldn't try to stop babies from mouthing objects – as long as they're safe for baby to explore! If in doubt, leave it out.

Items that babies should not mouth include those that pose a choking risk, such as small toys and round pieces of food such as grapes or cherry tomatoes. Other foods to avoid include:

- Popcorn
- Thick nut butters
- Crusty bread
- Hard apple chunks
- Hot dogs
- Whole nuts
- Giant blueberries
- Raw jelly cubes



And household items such as:

- Buttons
- Pen lids
- Coins
- Marbles
- Watch batteries
- Bottle lids
- Toy car wheels
- Toy figures and pieces aimed at older children e.g. Lego
- Any sharp items



There are of course other toxic items around the home, such as chemicals used for cleaning, soap, plants, pet food, soil and even cat litter which should always be kept out of reach. This isn't an exhaustive list, so use your common sense and make sure that your home is safe for your little one, particularly when they start crawling and can get themselves into all kinds of places. You wouldn't believe what they're capable of!

What about their gag reflex?

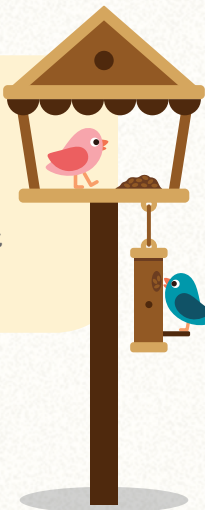
Mouthing increases around 4-6 months and this is when the gag reflex starts to desensitise and move towards the back of their mouth.

Before this you may have noticed that when your baby's hands find contact with their mouth, their tongue pushes out. This is a protective mechanism that babies are born with to prevent foreign objects from being choking hazards. Again, pretty clever!

Mouthing actually helps desensitise the gag reflex in preparation for starting to eat, meaning that it could even mean they gag less when weaning.

DID YOU KNOW...

More than half of parents don't understand the benefits of their baby exploring the world mouth-first (which is why we made this guide!)



What are the benefits?

As well as learning about the world and satisfying their natural curiosity, self-soothing and minimising teething pain, there's a theory that mouthing may also have an effect on your baby's immune system.

When babies are born, their immune system is very immature, but when they start mouthing things, they will inadvertently pick up germs, bacteria, viruses, etc which help their little bodies learn how to fight off potential infections. It might sound a bit scary, but actually try to remember it's normal.

It's thought that this is an evolutionary phenomenon whilst sheltering under the protective umbrella of breastfeeding where immunity is passed from mum to baby. Breastfeeding passes on some of the mum's immunity so it's theorised that babies are protected from bugs that they'd pick up from mouthing objects by this.

Mouthing also makes weaning easier as your baby will already understand different textures and temperatures of the items that they've explored, and of course food comes in lots of different textures, tastes and temperatures. It also helps strengthen their jaw and mouth muscles preparing them for eating and hand-eye coordination which is all great preparation for them feeding themselves.

What are the drawbacks?

We want you to enjoy and embrace mouthing, but like all things that are worth doing, there are some risks, including choking, picking up and putting a poisonous item into their mouth, picking up a germ that leads to illness – even the risk of food poisoning where they may pick up a piece of food that rolled under the sofa and has gone mouldy.

It's also worth a mention that when babies become particularly inquisitive, they may swipe their hands towards things that you're holding, so be mindful of hot drinks and hot food which could pose a risk of burns if your baby does manage to grab them.

But with a little help from this guide, we hope you'll feel reassured that with you on hand, your baby can explore mouth first safely.



How often is normal?

So research shows that mouthing can even start in the womb where babies are self soothing by sucking on their fists and can go right up to the age of five years. **It is not uncommon for babies to mouth things more than 100 times per day!** Around 90 mouthing events per day is average for a baby under two and over two this reduces to about 60 events per day.

Cake Slice

Ingredients:

Baby book

Baby washcloths

Cat crinkle toy



My baby doesn't put anything in their mouth – is that normal?

No, it isn't. Babies do need to do this so try not to discourage them.

If they don't show any signs of attempting to mouth even their hands or fists it's best to check in with your health visitor.

Babies who don't mouth things may struggle with weaning especially when it comes to foods of different textures.

Reasons for this may be:

- A sensory sensitivity – all humans have unique sensory preferences and it may be that your baby really does not enjoy the way things feel in their mouth. Don't worry though – they can be helped with the help of a specialist.

- Your baby doesn't have the coordination to bring an object up to their mouth. Some children don't have the muscle strength or coordination which can make it really difficult for them to physically mouth items.
- Your baby doesn't have mouth muscle coordination or strength. Some children can get the object to their mouths, but the muscles inside their mouth are too weak and so they find mouthing exhausting so don't bother.

It's fair to say that this is uncommon and more often associated with babies who are born prematurely or have global developmental delay. If you're worried, it's always best to flag it with your health visitor or doctor.

Fish & Chips

Ingredients: Loofah sponge
Brown paper Lace doily
Crayons Sponge

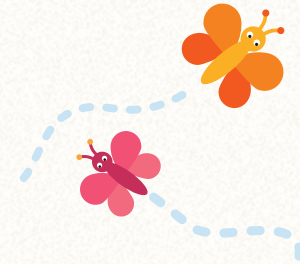
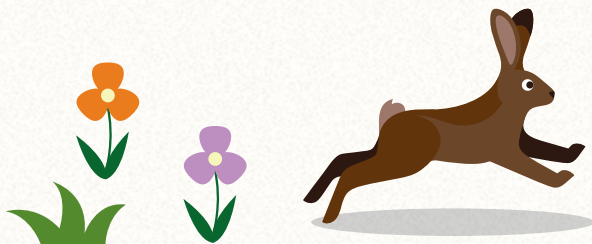


My baby was sick when they put an item into their mouth – should I worry?

Because babies put all different kinds of things in their mouth, there will always be the risk that something they mouth harbours a germ that makes them unwell. This is why I recommend baby-proofing your house to keep risks to a minimum. This includes frequent vacuuming (sorry!) and regular washing of toys and hands, especially if someone else or the dog has mouthed them. This will help decrease the risk of your baby becoming unwell.

DID YOU KNOW...

Parents told us some of **the weirdest things** their baby or toddler had popped in their mouths – which included a lump of coal, a slug, cat litter, old chewing gum – and several saying a dirty nappy!



How can I relax and enjoy it when I see my baby put things in their mouth?

The best way to relax about this phase is to be fully informed and knowledgeable that this is a normal and in fact, beneficial developmental stage. That's why we've prepared this guide. In addition, it's all about preparing your home to make sure that the items your baby mouths are safe for them and ensuring any food stuffs are fresh and not a choking risk.

You might also want to look at other ways you can support your baby's immunity.

Heinz Family's Immunity Support pouches contain L Paracasei, and Vitamin C.

Vitamin C supports the normal functioning of your little one's immunity.

Help! My baby put a cigarette butt / dog poo / soil in their mouth! What should I do?

First of all, it's happened to most of us, so don't beat yourself up! But **if your baby puts something potentially harmful in their mouths by accident, seek medical help straight away.**



Hamburger

Ingredients:

- Belt Bag
- Sunglasses
- Baby t-shirt
- Green Scrunchies
- Wallet

THE TEN MOST COMMON ITEMS BABIES EXPLORE MOUTH-FIRST*



About The Images:

We know our photography looks delicious but remember – these items aren't for eating! Make sure you keep an eye on your baby as they explore the world mouth-first.

Artist and creative, Kristina Lechner crafted these delicious images to represent the weird and wonderful everyday items babies put in their mouths as they explore the world mouth-first. These have been based on Opinium research data (collected between 26th Oct-1st Nov 2023) which surveyed 1000 parents of a child aged 6 months-2 years to reveal the most common non-food items babies put in their mouths.



*research commissioned by Heinz Family, Nov 2023