

# Why do babies put everything in their mouths?

Young babies tend to put everything in their mouths. Although it is a process that is not fully understood by science, it is regarded as a normal thing, and babies are hard-wired to do it.

It seems that putting things in the mouth serves several purposes. It is something that is done more intensively during the first 2-3 years of life, especially during the first year of life. Traditionally, it has been thought that babies do it to explore their environment as the mouth is quite sensitive in babies and other organs of information-collection are not as well-developed.

Most kids tend to put things in their mouths during the first year of life, as it is the period of teething. Hence, putting things in their mouths helps them to overcome the discomfort associated with teething.

Finally, science has started to look for other possible reasons for it, and one key theory is that putting things in their mouths (thus exposing them to microbes around) helps babies to prepare their naïve gastrointestinal system and calibrate the immune system against future threats while they are still under the protection of breastfeeding. Failure to expose the gut to environmental antigens and microbes may result in higher rates of allergies, infections, and other problems later in life.

But this process of exploration, adaptation, and calibration comes at a high cost as babies may put toxic things or things that can hurt them in their mouths. It is especially problematic behavior in toddlers as they can move fast, and keeping an eye on them all the time becomes next to impossible.

The only way to keep babies and toddlers safe is to change the environment and keep dangerous items away from their reach. Though as they grow and develop learning capabilities, one may teach children not to put things in their mouths.

Although most babies or toddlers stop putting things in their mouths as they grow, some of them do continue to do that even at a much older age, and that becomes a problem requiring behavioral therapy.

## Interesting to know; Psychology of oral fixation

It is the continued desire to put things in the mouth after such reflexes have served their initial purpose. Not only do growing children exhibit this, but even many adults also suffer from oral fixation. Grownups often keep their mouth busy with chewing gum, or even with nail-biting. It happens because for many of children and adults, it is a way to release energy developed by nervousness.

In fact, psychologist Sigmund Freud was one of the first to explain oral fixation and its relationship to childhood. According to him, it is quite related to the breastfeeding, and either the overindulgence or lower level of breastfeeding may have a different kind of effect on adult psychology. Those who were not fed enough by the breast may be left frustrated. Hence as adults they may be envious, pessimistic, and suspicious. Those who overindulge in breastfeeding during infancy grow up to be more dependent on others, with a feeling of helplessness.

Well, whether you believe in Freudian psychology or not, what has to be understood is that babies putting things in their mouths is normal, and maybe a necessary part of healthy growth.

*About the author:*

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Dr. Preet is a family physician. He has been practicing medicine for the last 15 years and often sees children with various health and behavioral difficulties. He understands the various problems of childhood and the questions it raises in the minds of the parents. He is also a passionate writer.

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