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Pacifier as a risk factor for acute otitis media: what is the evidence?

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Background & Aim: Acute otitis media (AOM) is an extremely frequent condition, particularly in the pediatric population, and one of the most common reason for administration of antibiotics.

Between 60 and 80 percent of children have at least one episode of AOM by one year of age, and 80 to 90 percent by two to three years. A long the years a number of risk factors for AOM has been appointment. One of those is the use of a pacifier.

The aim of this work is to determine the evidence of correlation between the use of pacifiers and the development of acute otitis media.

Method: A search was conducted in the following databases: PubMed, Cochrane, National Guideline Clearinghouse, Trip Database, Guideline finders, written in the English and published in the last 15 years. The following MeSH words were used: “pacifier use” and “acute otitis media”. The search was conducted from November first till end of December 2015.

The Strength of Recommendation Taxonomy (SORT) scale from the American Family Physician was used to determine the level of evidence and strength of recommendation.

Results: 36 articles were found, of which 15 were included. Two systematic reviews, two guidelines, three reviews and eight original articles.

Conclusions: This review found evidence supporting that an association between the pacifier usage and acute otitis media is very consistent. However, more studies are needed, with more rigorous methodologies and long-term follow-up, in order to obtain more consistent results.

Conflicts of interest: The authors disclose no conflicts.