








# The prevalence of atypical swallowing in early childhood and its relationship to breastfeeding and oral habits

Adriana Mendes <sup>1,2</sup>  0009-0001-0163-5492  
Ana Gião Carvalho <sup>3</sup>  0000-0003-0973-8418  
Maria Conceição Manso <sup>3,4</sup>  0000-0002-1774-1337  
Mónica Morado Pinho <sup>3</sup>  0000-0003-2373-1669  
Maria Gabriel Queiroz <sup>3</sup>  0000-0003-2115-6066

<sup>1</sup> DDS by Faculty of Health Sciences, Fernando Pessoa University, Porto, Portugal

<sup>2</sup> Student of Postgraduate Program in Pediatric Dentistry, Faculty of Dental Medicine, University of Porto, Portugal

<sup>3</sup> FP-I3ID, Faculty of Health Sciences, Fernando Pessoa University, Porto, Portugal

<sup>4</sup> RISE-Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, Fernando Pessoa University, Fernando Pessoa Teaching and Culture Foundation, Porto, Portugal

## ARTICLE INFO

Received 29 April 2026

Accepted 02 June 2026

### Keywords:

atypical swallowing  
type of breastfeeding  
infant oral habits

### Corresponding Author:

Adriana Mendes; Fernando Pessoa University - Faculty of Health Sciences, Porto, Portugal;  
adrianamendesmd@hotmail.com

DOI: 10.62741/ahrj.v3iSuppl. 2.150

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Atypical swallowing, also known as persistent infantile swallowing, is characterized by an inadequate pattern of positioning and movement of the tongue, lips, and other muscles involved in the swallowing process, which can interfere with craniofacial development and occlusion stability. This condition is relatively common during childhood, and its etiology is multifactorial, often associated with artificial breastfeeding, prolonged pacifier use, deleterious oral habits, and altered breathing patterns.

**Objectives:** The main objectives of this study were to determine the prevalence of atypical swallowing in a sample of children aged 3 to 6 years and to investigate its possible association with the type and duration of breastfeeding, pacifier use, oral habits, and type of breathing.

**Methodology:** This was a cross-sectional descriptive observational study carried out in two educational institutions in the municipality of Lousada, using a convenience sample of 62 children. Data collection took place in two stages: a questionnaire was administered to parents, and the children were clinically assessed, recording the type of swallowing, type of breathing, and presence of malocclusions. Statistical analysis was conducted using IBM® SPSS® Statistics software (vs. 30.0), with a significance level of 5%. Qualitative variables were described by counts and percentages, and quantitative variables by means, standard deviations, medians, and ranges; the association between variables was assessed using the chi-squared test and odds ratio. The 95% confidence interval for the percentage was calculated using the Wald method.

**Results:** The prevalence of atypical swallowing was 37.1% (95%CI: 26.1%-49.6%). There was no significant association between atypical swallowing and the variables analyzed ( $p > 0.05$ ). However, a trend towards lower prevalence of this condition was observed among children who were exclusively breastfed and never used a pacifier, which may suggest a protective effect of the combination of these behaviors.

**Conclusion:** It was found that atypical swallowing is a prevalent condition in infancy, but it was not possible to prove that there is any association between it and the length of time breastfed or oral habits. This study reinforces the importance of early diagnosis and an effective multidisciplinary approach to monitoring and treating this condition.

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**Contributions:** Conceptualization: AM and AGC; Data curation: AM, AGC and MCM; Formal Analysis: AM, AGC and MCM; Funding acquisition: not applicable; Investigation: AM; Methodology: AM, AGC and MCM; Project administration: AGC, MCM and MMP; Resources: AM and AGC; Software: AM and MCM; Supervision: AGC and MCM; Validation: AM, AGC, MCM and MGQ; Visualization: AM; Writing – original draft: AM, AGC and MCM; Writing – review & editing: AM, AGC, MCM, MMP and MGQ.

**Please cite this article as:** Mendes A, Manso MC, Pinho MM, Queiroz MG, Carvalho AG. Prevalence of atypical swallowing in early childhood and its relationship to breastfeeding and oral habits. *Athena Health & Research Journal*. 2026; 3(Suppl. 2). doi: 10.62741/ahrj.v3iSuppl. 2.150