

What's normal!

There are four blocks of sleep through the night for a baby going to sleep at 7.00pm

- 1) 7-10/11pm
- 2) 10/11.00-2.00am
- 3) 2.00-4/5am
- 4) 4/5-7am

Each has a different function. To make it simple those four blocks are

- 1) Dreaming
- 2) Growth and healing (Major)
- 3) Growth and healing (Minor)
- 4) Dreaming

Between each block every baby comes to a 'sudden partial waking' episode called a k-complex. This is a semi conscious state and should only last for 3-8 minutes before they go back to sleep.

Between these k-complex, a baby should not come to a partial waking state at all. If they do, there are common triggers for those disruptions.

Understanding triggers enables a parent to correctly diagnose the cause of sleep disruption and correct it through the day rather than resort to control crying without addressing the cause or perpetuate the problem by continuing to do the same things through the day that cause the problems. This way we can eliminate the wakings from happening in the first place, rather than try to work out what to do once it's too late and baby is awake and unhappy.

Common routine miscalculations that I call sleep thieves:

The early morning sleep thief:

Sleep taken between 7am and 12pm each morning effects your babies ability to sleep between 2-7am the following morning

The early evening sleep thief:

Sleep taken between 2pm and 7pm each afternoon effects your babies ability to sleep between 7-10 pm that same night.

The midnight sleep thief:

Prolonged wakings between 11pm – 2am are a sign over excessive accumulated sleep through the day. This creates a sleep debt and baby cannot sustain a full nights sleep. This creates a tired baby who oversleeps through the day and so the cycle continues.

An important parallel:

Sleep is fuel for the body; food is fuel for the body. Too much or too little of either will affect these sleep windows equally.

Below is a list of the sleep windows and causes for disruptions:

- 1) Difficultly getting your baby to go to sleep at 7pm is caused by;
 - a) Routine miscalculation – too much sleep offered or too late a sleep time offered that afternoon. This can also manifest with a baby going to sleep well at 7pm but will then wake 40 minutes later for a prolonged period of time.
 - b) Association/behavioural based problems. They are expecting you to help them to sleep and anticipating you will leave once they relax so they fight the sleep. This can also be a behavioural refusing to go to sleep - often based on stress with association changes.

- 2) Wakings between 7- 9.30pm.... This is commonly an indication of
 - a) Overheating – their body is sustained by hormones and adrenalin towards the end of their day so they are at their warmest in this first block of the night. SOLUTION: Cooler bath, don't heat the room, blankets should go on later before you go to bed, don't overdress.
 - b) Overstimulated that afternoon – body has had an adrenalin surge and it takes up to 3 hours for that adrenalin to burn off – so you will hear from them briefly every 40 minutes but they may or may not wake fully. SOLUTION: Be aware of stimulating cycles in the afternoon, and know they are best to be given a good 30 minutes without others around to wind down, and ensure your baby is not over handled if they are prone to becoming over stimulated.
 - c) A sign that they are non symptomatic but starting to get ill – viral. Their immune system is at a daytime low and they are starting to get aches and pains..... a little like how we feel worse at the end of the day that at the beginning when we aren't well. SOLUTION: offer discomfort relief if you have your suspicions.
 - d) They were already asleep when you left the room and have woken expecting you to be there and you have vanished. SOLUTION: Leave them in an honest environment that they will encounter when they wake up..... either stay and stay, or go and know they will feel comfortable if they do stir through the night when you're not there.

- 3) Wakings between 10-11pm, 2am, and between 4-5am. These are natural transitions between sleep patterns at nights. Every baby wakes at these times, the only difference in a baby than appears to sleep through and baby that cries is if they need your help to go to sleep or back to sleep or both. These associations that require your intervention are called parent governed association.

About Associations;

A baby has no concept of sleep or time lapsing so if you are there when they go to sleep, they will expect you to be there to go back to sleep.

SOLUTION: Empower a baby to settle into their sleep environment independently by teaching them to play in their cot when they are awake, cope with you leaving the room through short term absence cues and ensure they are snugly safe tucked into bed.

4) Wakings between 11.30-1.30am

This is a classic discomfort, illness window, poor nutrition or excessive day sleep window.

They are already sick

They have a food allergy and ate that food that day

They are teething

They have not eaten adequate balanced food, particularly if their iron levels are low or their protein intake is inadequate

Slightly dehydrated

The accumulated amount of sleep they took between 7am – 7pm creating a sleep debt.

This is when their immune system will be kicking into gear to fight off infections so were likely to see a spike in temperature here, they are growing teeth, hair, nails, bones, their system is accessing their stored nutrition for growth. If they are lacking in anything their body will make them wake and feed to continue it's work.

SOLUTION: If you already know they are unwell, you can offer pain relief at 10.30pm while their still sleeping so they can sleep through their healing window or teeth sprouting window. Check to be sure there are eating good quantities of fruit, vegetables and meat. If you haven't introduced a meat yet then introduce it by 6-7 months. Make sure they are well hydrated. Ensure they are on the correct routine and sleeping the right amount and not just oversleeping through the day to compensate for poor sleep at night, thus continuing the cycle of poor night sleep.

5) Wakings between 2.30-3.30am

This is for the same causes as the second window, but the imbalance is less significant.

They are at the tail end of an illness

They have a mild food intolerance or imbalance

Light rumbling of new little teeth in the jaw

Slight routine miscalculation

SOLUTION: If you already know they are at the tail end of being unwell, you can offer long lasting 8 hour pain relief at 10.30pm while their still sleeping so they can sleep through their healing window or teeth sprouting window. Check to be sure there are eating good quantities of fruit, vegetables and meat. Check if you have introduced any new foods and eliminate them for three weeks before trying them again and watching for

a reaction. If you haven't introduced a meat yet then introduce it by 6-7 months. Make sure they are well hydrated. Ensure they are on the correct routine and sleeping the right amount and not just oversleeping through the day to compensate for poor sleep at night, thus continuing the cycle of poor night sleep.

6) Wakings between 4.00 - 6.00 am (no resolution without a feed to resettle)

Their dinner was not an adequate quantity the night before.

They got too much sleep the previous morning between 7am and 12 pm.

They are too still in the mornings between 7am and 12pm – too much car, pram, shopping trolley, your arms and there is no need for the body to sleep in.

They are not getting enough challenging cognitive/problem solving play.

Their first sleep of the day the morning before happened too early.

Classically before 8.30-9.00am

SOLUTION:

Its not a great idea to have a baby in bed all night, in the highchair for breakfast then jump in the car and head out and have them in the pram or shopping trolley every morning before returning home for their sleep time. These babies are often still from 7pm the evening before to 2-3 pm in the afternoon. Ensure your little one has a good couple of hour exploring and challenging their environment every morning so the body built up a need to sleep in.

Make sure they are on the correct daily routine to suit their true need and not oversleeping each morning, or sleeping too early.

Make sure they have a good dinner before bed but equally a balanced day of solids and milk intake throughout the day. The old myth of last meal of the day is most important is only true in the case of the 4-6am window.