

EARLY RISING



**MY GUIDE TO HELPING YOU GET A
MORE SLEEP IN THE MORNING**

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EARLY RISING

Having a baby who wakes up early is exhausting and one of the more common reasons that families reach out for sleep my support. It is important to know that early for one family may not be early for another. For most, an early rise would be defined as waking up before 6:00 a.m.

Whenever we make any adjustments to a baby's wake time, this will require a series of parent-led changes (meaning that YOU are the one making the adjustments), but at the same time, it is important for you to tune in to your baby's natural rhythm and give them the chance to adjust to the changes before assessing whether or not the changes have worked. With this particular topic, it is really important to be patient.

COMMON CAUSES OF EARLY RISING

- Either the bedtime is too late or the gap between the last nap and bedtime is too long. Overtiredness can also happen with nap transitions (going from three to two, or two to one) and usually leads to early rising.
- The first nap of the day is too early (before 8:30 a.m.) and this can then reinforce early morning wakes.
- Naps are too short or infrequent, which results in not enough daytime sleep (sleep begets sleep).
- The total sleep hours are too high with naps. Meaning that if your baby needs 14 hours of sleep in 24 hours, and they are getting 5 of those hours during the day, they may then only take 9 hours at night which can lead to an early rise.
- "Stormy wonder weeks" will result in early rising—developmental milestones, sleep regressions, and major teething. Expect two to three weeks for things to settle back down.
- When the environment is not ideal, especially with the change in seasons (when the sun comes up earlier, and the room is not dark enough, or when the weather gets warmer and baby is not dressed appropriately). This is especially true for highly sensitive babies. It is important to remember that not all babies need pitch black darkness to sleep so what bothers one baby, may not bother another.

So what can we do?

STRATEGIES FOR EARLY RISING:

Early rising is really quite a tricky sleep challenge that requires a lot of patience and a lot of experimenting to figure out exactly what is going on with your baby.

My biggest piece of advice is to really tune in to your baby when making the changes and to give it time before trying something else.

1. Early bedtimes are key. If you have an early riser, you may want to aim for a bedtime before 8:00 p.m. to avoid an overtired little one (anywhere between 6:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. is ideal).
2. This next one is quite uncommon for babies younger than 9 months. When your baby's total sleep hours are too high with naps, you can cap (cut the nap short) the nap to add to nighttime sleep. For example, a 10-month-old who is taking a two-and-a-half-hour morning nap and a one-and-a-half-hour afternoon nap and sleeping from 8:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. That is four hours of nap time sleep with nine hours of nighttime sleep. Reducing the daytime sleep will add hours to the overnight sleep and we can do that by taking 30 minutes or one hour off the day sleep and watching to see if they add it to the night sleep. Remember to be patient.
3. If your little one is taking short naps, you may need to move bedtime earlier to make up for the missed hours of sleep.
4. This next one is the most common - the gap between your baby's last nap and bedtime should be no longer than their maximum wake window. If, for example, your 9-month-old can only go three hours without getting overtired during the day, make sure that they are in bed and asleep by the three-hour mark at bedtime as well or they will be overtired.
5. If you have resolved the overtired issue, and closed the windows between naps and bedtime, and waited to see if this will correct, and you still cannot get a later morning wake-up, you can move to something called a faded bedtime. This means that you would shift bedtime fifteen minutes later every three nights to see what this does to your morning wake time.

One thing that you will want to remember with a faded bedtime is to make sure that you are not creating too big of a window between last nap and bedtime.

You may need to move, for example, to a bigger wake window between nap 2 and three (use motion to then help you get the nap) so that you can protect the window before bed and avoid having an overtired baby.

You will want to continue moving bedtime until you have the ideal wake up time and keep it there for 7-10 days, then you can try moving it earlier by 15 minutes every three nights and see if you still keep the ideal morning wake.

6. It is important to remember that changing circadian rhythm (telling the body when to be awake and when to be asleep) takes seven to ten days minimum. You can use light to your advantage—when you want your little one to be awake, bring them into a bright, daytime environment, but when they should be asleep (even if they aren't yet), keep them in a dark, calm, quiet space.

The moment your baby's eyes hit the light of day, their circadian rhythm is locked in. This sets the pattern for morning to occur at the same time every day, and to be quite honest, it's a tough one to change. Even parents who have been diligent about avoiding daylight until 7:00 a.m., they may still have an early riser because their baby just can't sleep that late (children are naturally early risers). In this case, you may need to slowly move the light exposure in fifteen-minute increments each day.

7. Environment - You will want to take note of external noise and other things that may wake your baby. By 4:00 a.m. as babies no longer have sleep pressure built up to keep themselves asleep, so avoiding any external stimulus that can wake baby is key. Although your baby may still be tired with only eight, nine, or ten hours of sleep, they just can't fall back to sleep because the sleep drive is gone, and melatonin is depleted.

8. Discomfort - Know that just like a noise may wake your baby at 4 a.m., if they are hungry, cold, wet, or teething/uncomfortable, they will also wake. Can you offer a feed at 3 a.m. to get them through the early morning? Can you go up a size in overnight diapers so that they are not wet?

Early rising is a tricky challenge but with patience, love and empathy for your baby, you can get through this!