



Early Morning Waking's



Early morning waking's are super common, can be frustrating, and ultimately hard.

It can be one of the hardest components of the body clock to adjust. It often takes at least 2 to 4 weeks, sometimes on the upwards of 6 weeks to see early morning waking's come around.

These will come and go for all children, but how we as parents handle these wake-ups determine whether they will last or not.

Table of Contents

- What are Early Morning Waking's? 2**
- Causes of Early Morning Waking's 2**
 - Environmental – Light, Noise, and Temperature..... 3**
 - Schedule 3**
 - Daytime Sleep Issues 3
 - Timing of First Nap..... 3
 - Nap Schedule 4
 - Too Much Daytime Sleep 4
 - Bedtime 5
 - Overtired at Bedtime 5
 - Parental Reinforcement..... 6**
 - Reward Upon Waking..... 6
 - Hunger..... 7**
 - Lingering Sleep Associations and Drowsiness 7**
- Conclusion..... 8**

Disclaimer: The information contained in this document is confidential, and is only intended for the recipient. It may not be used, published or redistributed without the prior written consent of Chasing Dreams Sleep Consulting, LLC.



What are Early Morning Waking's?

A normal and healthy wake range for babies is between 6:00AM and 7:00AM; this is based on typical babies' circadian rhythm. Some parents have to wake their babies early in the morning due to their family schedule and if you need to have an earlier wake time in your household, that is fine. If it works for your family, then no need to change anything.

Before we get deeper - what is an early morning waking? In general, we will define this as having less than 11 hours of night sleep.

On occasion a child may wake early, but if he's getting a full night of sleep 11-12 hours, this is not an early waking. If this is the case with your child, the schedule may have just shifted too early, for example 6 pm bedtime with a 5 am wake up. This is actually appropriate (though not ideal for every family!), it is NOT an early wake up, just a matter of needing to shift the circadian rhythm and schedule.

Babies are typically feeling well-rested at this time, after having almost an entire night's sleep under their belt. The drive to sleep is low during this time, as melatonin levels are lowering with the rising sun. The combination of low sleep pressure, lowering melatonin levels and feeling well-rested make it an easy time for a baby's body to say "let's get up!", though they need that extra hour or two of sleep.

The slightest disturbance can wake them and they may find it difficult to fall back asleep. The last couple hours of sleep in the morning are the lightest sleep cycles. This combination of reduced sleep pressure, feeling rested and light sleep cycles may result in trouble falling back asleep.

Causes of Early Morning Waking's

If you are consistently experiencing difficulties with early morning waking's, and you'd like to change this, this guide will help you through. The first step to fixing Early Morning Waking's is figuring out what is causing them. Then once you've identified the culprit, you have to give it TIME. Fixing Early Morning Waking's is a matter of shifting your baby's internal body clock or circadian rhythm, which can take up to 2 weeks of consistency.

This guide will review common causes of these early waking's. See if anything needs to be tweaked-otherwise, just be patient! While frustrating, this can be a normal part of the process.



Environmental - Light, Noise, and Temperature

Is there light coming in under or around the door or windows during the early morning hours? Light signals the body that it's time to get up. Even the slightest sliver of light is enough to stimulate a waking and pull your baby's body out of sleep, ready to start his day. Make sure your child's room is DARK, I mean can't see your hand in front of your face, dark! Make sure the room is as dark at 4:00 AM to 6:00 AM, when melatonin levels are decreasing, as it is at midnight.

Are there random noises happening during the early morning hours? Is there a dog barking outside of his window? Is the air conditioner kicking on or off during this time? Coffee pot? Garbage truck? Is someone getting ready for work, making a little too much noise? Using continuous white noise will help block out any external sounds, it should be positioned between your child and the source of noise and remain on all night.

Make sure your baby is not waking up because she is sleeping at an uncomfortable temperature. There is a natural drop in body temperature around 4:00 AM so some babies will wake up because they are cold. Make sure your baby is dressed appropriately for the seasons and the temperature of your home.

Schedule

If your child is overtired (or sometimes under tired) it can cause your child to wake early in the morning. Following an appropriate schedule based on age-appropriate wake times is essential for your child's overall quality and quantity of sleep, and will help to eliminate early morning wake ups. Later bedtimes (and being overtired) can lead to even earlier waking's.

Daytime Sleep Issues

Timing of First Nap

Moving the first nap too early perpetuates early morning waking's. The first nap of the day should be based on the wake time from desired morning wake up time. If the first nap is too early, baby's body perceives this nap as a continuation of nighttime sleep and you are cementing that early morning waking, telling baby's body clock, yes, I want you to wake at 5am, because you'll get a nap soon after. Almost like a reward for the early morning waking.

In the short term, yes, this will lead to some overtiredness for a few days for the first nap, but you have to get on the other side of that hump. In the long term, this will correct early morning waking's and normalize the sleep schedule. If your little one woke much too early, try to get as close as possible to your first nap time, again based on the full wake time from desired wake time.



Nap Schedule

Remember as babies get older, sleep needs drop a little bit. If your baby takes three naps a day, it might be time to shorten up the 3rd nap or pull it all together. Check your child's schedule against a Wake Time Chart (There's one in the All About Nap's Document). If your baby takes two naps a day, try shortening the morning nap a bit. Make sure afternoon nap is not too close to bedtime. And lastly, sometimes an early wake up can be related to your child's need for a schedule adjustment, such as dropping a nap!

Common Age's for a Nap Transition:

4-3 Nap Transition, 3-4 Months old

3-2 Nap Transition, 7-8 Months old

2-1 Nap Transition, 12-15 Months old

1-0 Nap Transition, 3-4 Years Old

Too Much Daytime Sleep

If your baby is napping excessively during the day, she will not be tired enough to sleep enough at night. Night sleep is more restorative. Children require a specific amount of time awake and time asleep. Time asleep is split between nights and naps. If your baby is sleeping too much during the day, he won't sleep as well at night. He won't just magically sleep more overall. The same is true for sleeping excessively at night and interfering with naps, though not as common.

Example

A 5-month-old needs 15 hours of total sleep in a 24-hour period. Of those 15 hours of sleep, 11-12 hours should be at night, with 3-4 hours for daytime sleep, leaving 9 hours of time awake time ($15 + 9 = 24$ hours in a day...yes, there's a science to all of this!).

If she napped 5 hours during the day, this leaves 10 hours of night sleep available to the child; thus, she will wake "early", as she simply won't be tired enough to sleep longer, as her total sleep needs will have been met. She won't sleep 11-12 hours, as she has exceeded 15 hours of total sleep, yet still needs 9 hours of time awake; so, if she isn't getting that during the day, she may make up for it in the night or in those early morning hours.



Bedtime

Move bedtime earlier by 15-30 minutes. I know, that sounds like the opposite of what you should do but it often helps. This is not an overnight success; it usually takes about a week or so before you will start to see improvement.

If you tried for at least one week to move bedtime earlier and that didn't help, then try moving it later. I usually only recommend going 30 minutes later (than it was before you moved it earlier) and make sure your child is getting into bed before 8:00 PM. Give this about a week to work.

A later bedtime does not typically help with early morning waking's; the opposite is often true. Most babies' sweet spot for bedtime is 7-8pm, but if you're already in that range, try just 15 minutes earlier. An earlier bedtime helps babies sleep later most of the time.

Overtired at Bedtime

Yes, we want baby to have enough awake time before bed but being overtired at bedtime can manifest as night waking's and/or early morning waking's. For example, for an 10-month-old, if last nap ended at 3pm and bedtime is 7 PM, but keeping in mind, MAX awake window is 3.5 hours. So, you may need to bump bedtime by 30 minutes to 6:30 PM to help with overtiredness. It's best to follow age-appropriate wake times, with keeping your ideal bedtime in mind. Bedtime should fluctuate, based upon your child's naps.



Parental Reinforcement

Our bodies have a pretty set internal body clock, or circadian rhythm. Have you ever noticed that you wake up at the same time (well, maybe this was before kids!), even on the weekends? This is due to your circadian rhythm. The same is true for our children. If you get your baby out of bed repeatedly at 5am, this becomes their internal biological alarm clock. Treat anything before 6am or your desired wake time as a night waking.

It is very helpful to keep your child in bed in the dark room until your desired wake time (DWT), by either staying out of his room until DWT or going in there and sitting with him until DWT. If you don't keep your child in the dark room, it can make the child's body clock and melatonin levels set to waking before DWT regularly which is usually too early for babies and young children to be waking to start the day.

If your baby wakes at midnight, you wouldn't just pour yourself a cup of coffee and say well, I might as well start my day, right? So, don't reinforce this early morning waking by starting your day then. No one should have to wake before 6am, unless they have to, and especially babies who need that extra hour.

Leaving your child until your desired and appropriate wake time will be a very important tool to help her work past the early wake ups. It is important to treat these early wake ups as you would a night waking.

Reward Upon Waking

Avoid anything too "rewarding" immediately upon waking, it can reinforce the early waking's - for an infant, this may be sleeping a few extra hours in mom's bed or a feeding; for a toddler this may be watching his favorite show upon waking, snuggles in Mommy's bed, cup of milk, I-Pad..

Take a look at what's happening when your little one is first waking. Anything your little one gets too immediately that is "rewarding" can become the reason she'll want to wake up early again the next day.

For a toddler, this may mean delaying watching Mickey Mouse while drinking his cup of milk he's been waiting for since bedtime. For a baby, this might mean delaying the morning feed by 10-15 minutes rather than an immediate feed upon waking.



Hunger

I'm not saying your baby isn't hungry, he might be, but hear me out before you go straight to feeding. Often, as parents this is our first go-to and it creates a situation in which our babies wake out of habit rather than true hunger.

It's been a number of hours since bedtime, she is probably starting to feel hungry. Does she truly need a night feed, or can she wait another hour until morning? That feed will likely interfere with your first feed of the day, throwing off all of your feeds for the day. The general answer here is do not feed your baby during this early morning wake up, as this will likely only encourage this cycle of wanting to eat so close to morning, and encouraging this waking period.

If your baby is truly waking out of hunger, add calories to their day by adding ounces to their daytime bottles or add in an extra nursing session or two. If your breastfed baby is not having a good bedtime nursing session, it may be beneficial to try a bottle as your last feed, as your supply is naturally lowest at the end of the day.

During the day, don't have such a rigid feed schedule, rather feed on demand (but never feed to sleep).

If your baby is over 8-9 months old, make sure he is having 3 solid food meals a day and getting some healthy sources of fat and protein in his solid food diet.

Lingering Sleep Associations and Drowsiness

Be sure that your child isn't drowsy going down at bedtime; sometimes this means leaving a light on through the entire routine and turning it off after she goes down into bed.

Your baby has to fall asleep independently at bedtime, when all the conditions are right, in order to be able to do it in the early morning hours.

If your baby has a feeding in the bedtime routine make sure it isn't too close to going down to bed. The feeding should be *at least* 20 minutes from your baby going into bed crib at bedtime. Also make sure this feeding is a good feed, meaning baby isn't getting too sleepy or not eating enough. This is a very common problem that I see- families leave the feed too close to bedtime, which causing a lingering eat to sleep association. While it appears that baby is wide awake- it does cause issues. Move the feed earlier in the routine, this is very important!

If there are lingering sleep associations at bedtime, this can lead to early morning waking's. If your child doesn't have true independent sleep skills, it will be very challenging to fall back asleep in the early morning hours, when most of his sleep needs met and when sleep pressure is lower.



Conclusion

This guide should help you navigate early morning wake ups! If something has come up and derailed you, and you need help getting on track - or maybe you just need some assistance with a rocky spot, e-mail me! I'm happy to help you through. We will find the right level of support for you, maybe a single phone call, or if you need more, extended e-mail or phone support may be a good option. I am always here for you and your child, no matter what comes up.

New baby, new struggles? I'm here for that as well!

early rising PRO TIPS



MORNING VS NIGHT

The first course of action is to treat anything before 6AM or desired wake time as a night waking



QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Is bedtime too late or too early?
- Is baby getting enough daytime sleep?
- Is baby getting too much daytime sleep?
- If baby is overtired?
- Is baby consuming enough daytime calories?



BEDTIME

Overtiredness can lead to early wakings. If you suspect overtiredness, move bedtime forward by 30 minutes for 3-4 days.

Alternatively, not enough sleep pressure can also lead to early rising, so pushing bedtime back by 30 minutes later may help in this scenario.

SLEEP ENVIRONMENT

White noise to block out environmental noises that could wake baby (barking dog, neighbor leaving for work, etc.)



Darkness is a must. We want it to be as dark at noon as it is at midnight in your baby's room.

Ensure comfortable **sleep attire** and an appropriate temperature (68-72). Our body temperature naturally dips in the early morning hours, which can lead to a waking if not dressed appropriately.



REWARD UPON WAKING

Anything too rewarding that happens immediately when coming out of the bed can perpetuate early morning rising.

For an infant, give 10-15 minutes for your child to be fully alert for their first feed and offer that feed outside the bedroom in a well lit room.

For a toddler, wait 10-15 minutes before giving milk and/or turning on those cartoons.



PARENTAL INTERVENTION

The best thing you can do is to leave you child with as little intervention as possible until your desired wake time. Too much support from parents can stimulate a waking rather than help get back to sleep.

Some children are naturally early risers. If you've tried all of the suggestions above (for 3-4 days at a time) and your child is still waking early you may have an early riser and you may need to commit to an earlier bedtime.