

Early Morning Waking Troubleshooting Checklist

Is Your Baby Waking at 5am Every Day?

If you're reading this while clutching a coffee before sunrise,
you're not alone.

Early morning wakings are one of the most common sleep
concerns parents bring to me.

The good news? There is usually a reason behind them.

This checklist will help you work through some of the most
common causes of early waking and identify what might be
contributing to your little one's early starts.

Remember: sleep is rarely about one thing. Often it's a
combination of small factors working together.

Let's investigate.



1. Is It Really An Early Wake?

Before making changes, ask yourself:

- ☐ Is my child waking before 6am?
- ☐ Are they genuinely awake and ready to start the day?
- ☐ Or are they stirring briefly and then returning to sleep?
- ☐ Could I be accidentally reinforcing the wake by starting the day too early?

Many babies and toddlers move in and out of light sleep during the early morning hours. Sometimes giving them a little space can allow them to resettle independently.

2. Check The Sleep Environment

The final hours of sleep are often the most fragile.

Ask yourself:

- ☐ Is the room completely dark at 5am?
- ☐ Is sunlight creeping around curtains or blinds?
- ☐ Are birds, traffic or household noises waking them?
- ☐ Is the room becoming too warm or too cold?
- ☐ Is white noise being used consistently throughout the night?

Small environmental changes can make a surprisingly big difference.



3. Could Overtiredness Be Playing A Role?

Overtiredness can sometimes contribute to early waking.

Ask yourself:

- ☐ Has bedtime become later recently?
- ☐ Have naps been shorter than usual?
- ☐ Is my child waking frequently overnight?
- ☐ Do they seem tired and irritable during the day?
- ☐ Are they struggling to settle at bedtime?

If several of these apply, your child may benefit from some extra sleep support and an earlier bedtime for a short period.

4. Has Their Sleep Rhythm Changed?

As children grow, their sleep needs evolve.

Ask yourself:

- ☐ Is my child approaching a nap transition?
- ☐ Have they recently dropped a nap?
- ☐ Are naps becoming difficult?
- ☐ Are they waking happy and ready to start the day?
- ☐ Does their current routine still seem to suit them?

Sometimes early waking is a sign that sleep needs are changing rather than a sign that something is wrong.



5. Are Developmental Changes Happening?

Babies love practising new skills.

Ask yourself:



- ☐ Have they recently started rolling, crawling, standing or walking?
- ☐ Are they babbling or chatting in the cot early in the morning?
- ☐ Is there a sleep regression happening?
- ☐ Have they suddenly become more alert and active?

Developmental leaps can temporarily disrupt sleep and often improve with time.

6. Could Hunger Be Contributing?

For some babies, hunger may still play a role.

Ask yourself:

- ☐ Is my baby under 12 months old?
- ☐ Are they taking full feeds during the day?
- ☐ Has their appetite changed recently?
- ☐ Do they settle quickly after feeding?
- ☐ Could illness, teething or a growth spurt be affecting intake?

If you're unsure whether hunger is contributing, it can help to look at feeding patterns alongside sleep.

7. Has It Become A Body Clock Pattern?

Our bodies love routine.

Ask yourself:



- ☐ Has my child been waking at the same time for several weeks?
- ☐ Do I usually start the day at that time?
- ☐ Am I turning lights on or leaving the bedroom shortly after they wake?
- ☐ Does their body seem to expect wakefulness at that time now?

If so, their body clock may simply need some gentle support to shift later.

What Should I Try First?

Choose ONE area to focus on:

- ☐ Improve blackout coverage
- ☐ Introduce or optimise white noise
- ☐ Review bedtime timing
- ☐ Look at overall sleep rhythm
- ☐ Consider whether a nap transition is approaching
- ☐ Keep early mornings calm, dark and low stimulation
- ☐ Ensure enough daytime calories

Avoid changing everything at once.

Small, consistent changes are usually more effective than lots of dramatic adjustments.

Still Stuck?

If you've worked through this checklist and early mornings are still dominating your life, it may be time to look at the bigger picture.

Sleep is rarely about one isolated issue.

Sometimes a fresh pair of eyes can identify what's really driving the early wake-ups and help you create a plan that feels realistic, gentle and achievable.

I'd love to help.

Hannah Quirke

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