Early Waking Checklist

5 simple steps to find what's waking your little one so early

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Before You Start

Early waking is very common, and it usually has a fixable cause. In the early morning, your baby has used up most of their sleep drive and their body's natural wake-up hormone is already rising. Sleep is lighter, so small things are more likely to wake them fully.

Work through these steps in order to find what's tipping your little one awake. Tick each box as you check it off.

Step 1: Is It Actually Early?

Add up your baby's total sleep across 24 hours, day and night. If it's already in a normal range for their age and they wake happy, they may simply have had all the sleep they need. You can then just adjust naps and bedtime to support a later wake up.

- [ ] Total 24-hour sleep is in a normal range for age
- [ ] Baby wakes content, not upset or still tired
- [ ] Naps and mood through the day are good

Step 2: Check the Room

Early morning sleep is light, so the room matters more at 5am than earlier in the night when melatonin and sleep pressure are driving sleep.

- [ ] **Light:** the room is fully dark, with no light creeping in around blinds or under the door as the sun rises
- [ ] **Noise:** early sounds (birds, traffic, a partner getting up, a sibling) are masked, for example with white noise left on all night
- [ ] **Temperature:** baby is warm enough in the coldest hours before dawn, without being too hot

Step 3: Check Baby's Body

- [ ] **Hunger:** baby eats well through the day. If baby feeds at 5am and then goes happily back to sleep, hunger may be part of it
- [ ] **Discomfort:** look for teething, illness, a wet or dirty nappy, reflux or wind, or clothing that's too tight or scratchy

Step 4: Check the Timing of Sleep

If baby's sleep need is already met by early morning, there's little sleep drive left to carry them through.

- [ ] **Day sleep:** total nap time isn't more than baby needs for their age and sleep needs
- [ ] **Last nap:** isn't too long or too close to bedtime, so baby has enough sleep pressure at bedtime
- [ ] **Bedtime:** bedtime isn't so early that baby has had a full night's sleep by 5am
- [ ] **Bedtime:** isn't so late that baby goes to bed stretched and unsettled

Step 5: Check Settling and How the Day Starts

At 5am sleep drive is low, so falling back asleep is much harder than earlier in the night. How you respond can also teach the body clock when "morning" is.

- [ ] **Resettling:** baby is confident in settling independently to sleep and resettling independently overnight. If baby needs help to fall asleep at bedtime and throughout the night, they may need the same help at 5am (which is totally fine if you are ok with this)
- [ ] **Start of the day:** early wakes are treated like night wakes (lights low, calm and quiet) until your chosen wake-up time
- [ ] **First nap:** the first nap isn't so soon after an early wake or for too long that it acts like a continuation of night sleep

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Are Nights Broken Too?

If your baby is also waking a lot in the night, treat that as a clue rather than a separate problem. The same things (hunger, light, noise, cold, discomfort, or needing help to resettle) often cause both night wakes and early wakes. After a broken night, the body's wake-up hormone also seems to rise more steeply by morning, so baby may wake sooner. Smoothing out the night often helps the morning too.

Be patient with changes. Give each adjustment about a week before deciding whether it's working, and change one thing at a time so you can see what helps.

Need More Support?

If you've worked through the checklist and early mornings are still a struggle, I'd love to help.

1. **Sleep Well System:** my step-by-step program, with all my feeding and sleep schedules by age. Find out more
2. **Clarity Call:** we'll pinpoint exactly what's behind your baby's early wakes. Book your call
3. **VIP Sleep Intensive:** personalised, hands-on support for babies 6–24 months. Learn more

Warmly,
Mel

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