

# Split Nights



Little Village Sleep

# WHAT ARE THEY?

Sometimes, your baby will wake up in the middle of the night and not seem to want to go back to sleep. They may not even look sleepy but rather wide awake and wanting to play.

A split night is identified when it becomes a pattern and occurs over several consecutive nights. Once you recognize and distinguish the split night from typical night wakings, you can work toward correcting the problem using sleep science.

Biological sleep disruptions can occur in all of us, but in babies, this typically occurs because of unbalanced daytime sleep. This means that the total amount of daytime sleep is too high and/or the bedtime is too early. This then leads to sleep pressure separating from your baby's circadian rhythm. Both of these two work together to extend a baby's night sleep, ideally for twelve hours, but when sleep is not balanced, these split nights can happen. If not enough sleep pressure has accumulated before bedtime, babies can wake after eight or nine hours of sleep, feeling well-rested and unable to resettle.

There is nothing wrong with an early bedtime, provided that the total amount of night sleep does not exceed twelve hours (and for some babies 11/12 hours might be too much). When we regularly start using an early bedtime to compensate for a bad day of naps (doing this on occasion is fine but not if it is happening daily), you may end up with a thirteen-hour night, and over time, it will lead to a split night.

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## IMPORTANT NOTE

A reminder that it is very normal for your little one to wake at night when they are working on a new milestone and stay awake for an hour or two. This can happen for two weeks. If, however, this has been going on for three or more weeks, and it is happening at least 5 out of 7 nights, then it would be considered a split night.

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# WHAT TO DO?

Correcting the problem involves dedication and commitment. It will involve a series of parent-led changes. The night needs to condense before it can extend again. Start by shifting bedtime later each night by fifteen minutes. To get the bedtime later, you will likely need to add a nap to increase your baby's daytime sleep first. If you have a baby on two naps or one nap, you will need to move that afternoon nap to later in the day (therefore, a bigger gap between nap 1 and 2 or a bigger gap between wake up and your only nap) to make sure that the window before bed is not too big. Use whatever strategy you can (motion, in arms, bedsharing) to get the slightly longer nap/later nap until you have closed the split night. If, for example, you have a 10-month-old baby who wakes at 6 am, naps from 9-10, then 2-3, then asleep at 7 pm, and they are awake every night for 2 hours, then we want to move the pm nap to 2:15-3:15, bedtime to 7:15 and see what happens. If that does not close the split night, which it oftentimes will not try 2:30-3:30 and 7:30, then 2:45 - 3:45, and then 7:45. You may need to push the morning nap a little later if your afternoon nap is starting at 3pm and your little one just can't make it.

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If you have moved bedtime to 8:30 p.m. and you are still not able to close the split night, you may need to start waking your little one fifteen minutes earlier each day.

From my experience with trying to shift a child's circadian rhythm it requires patience and can take anywhere from 5-10 days to resolve. Every time you move bedtime or the wake time, hold the timing there for three nights before moving it again. Wait to see if the split night will resolve before changing the timing again. Once the split night closes, wait for those 5-10 days, slowly start moving bedtime earlier by 15 minutes and see if you can keep the full block of sleep or whether the split night comes back. Keep moving the times until you get to the ideal bedtime, but know that it might be later than you had previously, as that was not working for your little one.

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