



## **Understanding Sleep Regressions from Birth to 4 Years**

**A Guide by Francesca Beauchamp, Sleep Consultant, Maternity Nurse & Baby Expert...**

### **Introduction**

Sleep regressions are often discussed with a sense of dread, but I want to help you understand them in a way that feels empowering, not intimidating. As a sleep consultant and maternity nurse with 18 years of experience working with babies and young children, I know that these sleep disruptions are closely linked to developmental milestones rather than true “sleep regressions.” When we approach them with the right knowledge and support, we can guide little ones toward better sleep in a way that feels natural and sustainable for the whole family.

This guide will walk you through what to expect at each stage, why it happens, and how to support your child through these transitions...

### **0-4 Months: The First Major Sleep Change**

#### **What happens?**

- In the first few months, babies have a newborn sleep cycle—drifting between light and deep sleep (aka quiet sleep)
- Around 4 months, a biological shift occurs: their sleep cycles mature and start to resemble an adult’s, moving through lighter stages to reach deeper sleep stages
- This change is often referred to as the 4-month sleep regression, but it’s actually a permanent transformation.

#### **What to expect:**

- More frequent night wakings
- Shorter naps (as babies struggle to link sleep cycles)
- Increased difficulty settling

#### **How to support sleep: (Lots of families call me at this age!)**

- Help your baby learn to self-settle by putting them down drowsy but awake
- Introduce a consistent sleep routine to provide predictability
- Ensure wake windows are age-appropriate (e.g., 120 minutes at this stage)

## 6-9 Months: Exploring the World (and Night Wakings!)

### What happens?

- Around 6-9 months, babies undergo huge cognitive and physical leaps
- They start crawling, babbling, sitting, and recognizing familiar people
- These developmental changes can disrupt sleep, as their brains are busy processing new skills

### What to expect:

- Increased night waking (sometimes due to excitement from new motor skills)
- Resistance to naps as wake windows need adjusting
- Separation anxiety may emerge, making bedtime more challenging

### How to support sleep:

- Encourage independent sleep habits by avoiding creating new sleep associations (like rocking to sleep if they previously didn't need it)
- Adjust their schedule to longer wake windows as needed
- Practice daytime separation (peekaboo, short moments apart) to ease bedtime anxieties

## 12-15 Months: Nap Transitions and New Independence

### What happens?

- Around 12-13 months, many toddlers begin transitioning from two naps to one
- Their mobility increases—walking, climbing, exploring!
- Language comprehension grows, leading to a greater awareness of bedtime routines (and sometimes testing boundaries – super normal!)

### What to expect:

- Temporary night wakings as they adjust to a new nap schedule
- Increased bedtime resistance (especially if they're overtired from dropping a nap too soon)
- Clinginess or wanting extra reassurance at night

### How to support sleep:

- Gradually shift to one nap—this transition takes time!
- Keep bedtime consistent, even if naps fluctuate
- Offer extra verbal reassurance but stay firm with routines

## 18-24 Months: Language Explosions & Sleep Disruptions

### What happens?

- Between 18-20 months, toddlers experience a huge leap in language skills
- Many start singing, chatting, or repeating words at bedtime (sometimes delaying sleep)
- Around 24 months, another developmental shift occurs as toddlers assert more independence

### What to expect:

- Longer time to fall asleep due to active minds
- Possible early morning wakings if their schedule isn't well-balanced
- Increased resistance to bedtime as they test boundaries

### How to support sleep:

- Keep pre-bedtime calm and screen-free to help their minds wind down
- If they start stalling bedtime, stay consistent but offer age-appropriate choices such as choosing PJ's/ Bedtime Book/ Turning out their own light
- Make sure their daytime nap isn't too long, as it can impact nighttime sleep

## 2.5-4 Years: The Final Sleep Hurdles

### What happens?

- Between 2.5 and 3 years, many toddlers begin dropping their nap
- Imagination soars, sometimes leading to night fears or nightmares
- By age 4, sleep stabilizes, but external factors (preschool, social changes) may temporarily disrupt sleep

### What to expect:

- Increased bedtime battles as they push for more independence
- Possible early waking if they drop naps too soon
- Night fears or waking due to overactive imagination

### How to support sleep:

- If they still need a nap, limit it to 30-45 minutes to protect nighttime sleep
- Use gentle reassurance for fears
- Offer positive bedtime reinforcement (sticker charts, bedtime stories about sleep)

## Final Thoughts

Sleep regressions (or, rather, progressions!) are a normal part of child development. The key is to adapt your approach as your child grows, ensuring they have the right balance of routine, reassurance, and independence.

If you need personalised support, **I'm here to help.**

My approach is gentle, tailored, and built around what works for **YOUR** family. Let's navigate these milestones together so your little one (and you!) can sleep peacefully.

Get in touch today for expert guidance!

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