



Beyond
The Birth

Feeding, Sleeping, Connecting

4-Month

Sleep

PRO-gression

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Baby-led Sleep™ & Well-being Specialist
Certification Course Created by Lauren Heffernan
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What Happens During The 4mos Sleep Progression?


Five Changes

- 1 The end of the Stimulus Barrier** (the reason why babies can sleep anywhere as newborns because it keeps them from getting overwhelmed by the world around them) starts to disappear around 6-8 weeks (peak fussy period) and by the 4-month mark, it is completely gone.
- 2 The switch to Supply & Demand** may mean more wakes to feed in order to regulate and increase supply if you are breast/chest feeding and your baby has been going longer stretches at night. Before the 6-8 week mark your supply was hormonally driven playing larger part in helping you maintain supply. However, around that 6-8 week mark if baby does not empty the breast for long periods of time, then your supply can decrease and this can show up around the 3-4 month mark. Babies will then do what their built to do, staying up all night feeding to increase your supply. Babies will always regulate your supply to meet their nutritional needs and while exhausting, this is a good thing.
- 3 The Distracted Daytime Feeds** are a byproduct of the end of the stimulus barrier and can lead to babies preferring to feed all night as prolactin levels are highest (meaning more milk) in the middle of the night and early morning hours + they are also less distracted.
- 4 The Permanent Change to baby's Sleep Cycles** happens around the 4 month mark. Their cycles become more adult like only they are unfortunately much shorter. This can really impact their sleep and can look like your baby waking every 45-50min.

5 The First Big Physical Milestone occurs around this age, as a lot of babies are learning to roll which can be a really big sleep interrupter. You may notice that your baby rolls onto their tummy and cannot get back over so they wake up and cry. This will mean lots of frustration for the both of you and will require you to have lots of patience. Once a baby can roll comfortably from their back to their stomach and back onto their back, you no longer have to worry about flipping them over if they prefer tummy sleep.

Will I Survive The Big 5? YES!

BABY-LED STRATEGIES:

- **Know** when your baby is tired. Every baby has their unique tired cues. Taking a few days to really tune into them and discovering the **early cues** is invaluable. You'll avoid a cranky overtired baby and that's always a good thing!
- Figure out the best ways to support your baby to sleep. There are **no "bad habits"**! Use motion, carrier, nursing, and in-arms naps.
- **Practice practice practice!** Ditch the daily stroller and carrier adventures and instead provide lots of floor time to practice their new skills (like rolling). Plenty of tummy time during the day means less practice sessions in the middle of the night! Check out the TummyTime Method™ on youtube.
- **Let it go**, Let it goooo!  Seriously, forget the schedule and the fact that your baby *was* sleeping for longer stretches. Try to be in the moment as much as possible because while the progression is temporary your memories of this time are forever.

PARENT-LED STRATEGIES:

- How many ways can you put your baby to sleep? Making sure that you have a **menu of ways to soothe your baby** back to sleep will ensure that this progression does not last longer than it needs to. Nurse, rock, bounce, pat, sing, use motion, etc. Change it up throughout the day. (note: nursing to sleep is totally normal and healthy for baby and instead of stopping this you can simply add in other associations, noted above, before or while you nurse to sleep)
- Make an appointment with the **Lactation Consultant** if you are worried that your supply has changed. Pediatricians or primary care providers are not usually the best source of evidenced based information and advice on lactation, in fact they are notorious for giving *really* bad advice. Find an LC to collaborate with asap!
- Create and make use of your **village**. I discuss the village down below, but before you skip ahead just note that it's never a bad time to ask for help and it's always the perfect time for them to shine in their helper roles.
- Pass on the rigid schedules but definitely go for some solid and consistent **rhythms & routines**. The bedtime and naptime routines you establish help your baby know what's coming next and helps them feel ready to sleep regardless of the actual time the routines occur. This will help you avoid the cranky overtired baby we already talked about, as you'll be following their cues instead of the clock.
- **Don't make any major changes** to daytime/nighttime sleep, least of all try to "teach sleep" or sleep-train(the former is a myth and the latter is never a great idea). It is best to remain consistently responsive and respectful as you continue to build a healthy attachment with your baby. Remember that baby is going through some growing pains too. It's a lot for your little one! So, be gentle with them and with yourself. Both of you will get a bit more rest soon enough.

Your Village

This progression can last for one month so it's a great time to build your support village if you haven't already. Engaging your partner, friends, family, postpartum doula, or other carers to help you find rest is invaluable and will help you practice self-care. A sane caregiver is better than a prideful one, so don't be afraid to reach out and ask for support (this can include professional support as well)! However, you may not have a village readily available and you may not have the income for a postpartum doula or even the occasional nanny/babysitter (*I sure didn't!*). So, what to do?

One strategy to create your village is finding a local moms group (birth centers, hospitals, and La Leche League usually provide one for free) or just local moms (via facebook or the peanut app) in your area and creating with them what I call a "**Mommy Care Pod**".

A MCP is a group of moms, or at least 2, that offer each other carer duties on a rotation bases (specific arrangements can be different for every pod) so that each mom has access to an hour or a few hours of time per week/month to themselves to recoup/rest/sleep/enjoy a self-care activity, etc. You can also stay and not necessarily leave baby with your MCP friend. Instead you can stay at their home or yours (even in a public place) and still have some help while also having the opportunity to chat and vent with a friend. This is a great option for moms who lack a readily available support system. It just takes finding the right moms to join your pod, who you trust, and who share in similar parenting philosophies as you. They may not be able to take over nighttime duties with you (that would be too much to ask), but they can offer you a break during the daytime so that you can recuperate. You also get the chance to pay them back and also pay it forward with another mom in the future.

Mindfulness Practice Before and During your Bedtime Routine (or any time you need it)

So you get that these progressions are temporary and you get that you have to reach for your village and *let go*, BUT... How exactly do you do this and how do you get over the nighttime rage fueled by exhaustion (you know the one I'm talking about)? How do you manage the anxiety you feel every time bedtime approaches?

One answer is MINDFULNESS. While it sounds really woo, mindfulness is a great coping strategy and it WORKS. It's backed by science! Below, you'll find my step by step guided practice that you can incorporate daily right before your bedtime routine or while you parent your little one to sleep. This practice at the start of your night consistently will gradually improve how you show up during middle of the night wakings. This isn't a quick fix, but what *is* in parenting?! Instead, this is a gradual shift in how we perceive and approach nighttime parenting so that we aren't just stuck in a cycle of misery *and* sleeplessness (which by the way doesn't have as much to do with how much or how little sleep we're getting as we think).

STEP 1

Take the deepest breath you've taken all day. In through your nose for a count of 4, hold it for a count of 2, and out through your mouth for a count of 6 or 7. You're looking for your tummy to expand outward with each inhale and decompress with each exhale. Breath work is essential when we're trying to reduce stress and anxiety and when we're intentional about remaining mindful--in the present moment.

It moves us out of our sympathetic nervous system response (fight/flight/freeze) and moves us into our parasympathetic response (rest + digest). This is important because our little ones mirror our mood states, as they are wired to do, and they quickly pick up on our distress. The more calm and present we can remain, the better we're able to co-regulate with them and help them feel safe, relaxed, and soothed. All the things that help us progress into a more peaceful sleep!

STEP 2

Take note of your senses and hyper focus on each for at least 10 seconds. You can do this while you continue your deep breathing or after. Take note of what you're currently seeing, feeling, tasting, smelling, and hearing.

- Are you **seeing** the room you're in, shadows on the walls, furniture, the glow of a small night light, your baby's face/head/hair/eyes/etc?
- Are you **feeling** the weight of your baby in your arms, the suckling at your breast, the bottle or phone in your palm, the pressure of your back resting on your chair or pillow, the floor underneath your feet, the clothes you're wearing on your skin, your hair gently resting in a top knot on the crown of your head, etc?
- Are you **tasting** the meal you just ate, a peppercorn stuck in your teeth, the drink you're having, your saliva, etc?
- Are you **smelling** your baby's scent, your own scent, the smell of the room, the oil you're diffusing, the smell of laundry detergent, the smell of diapers, the smell of baby soap or lotion, etc?
- Are you **hearing** your own breath, your baby's breath, your baby's heartbeat, your heartbeat, a ticking clock, the white noise machine, the noise outside your window, cars passing by, family or friends in another room of your home, your stomach rumbling, your baby burping or passing gas, etc?

The purpose of this exercise is to bring you fully into the present moment. This helps you come back to calm and will also help you navigate your thoughts. Our habit of getting stuck in past and future tense thinking is what often also keeps us in a state of distress and anxiety or sadness because we can never change the past and we can't predict our futures. If you can change this habit gradually and practice spending some time daily fully immersed in the present moment, this can help increase your ability to feel calmer and happier, even while you navigate the difficult aspects of parenting.

STEP 3

Pay attention to your thoughts without giving them too much of your focus or attention. This part of the practice is the hardest to master but it *does* get easier over time. Our thoughts never stop and they don't have to in order to avoid having them affect us in negative ways. We can use some imagery to help us practice accepting our thoughts while not giving them too much attention so that we're free to stay in the present moment.

Example of some thoughts you may notice during your practice:

"I have to get to some chores" "this is taking too long" "I'm so tired"
"What was the name of that product I read about today?" "I'm not doing this right" "This is stupid" "Am I breathing right" "This is probably not worth it" "Am I forgetting some senses?" "Is this me paying too much attention to my thoughts?"

These thoughts and all others are normal and will come up during your mindfulness practice. It's unavoidable. But what you can begin to control is how much power you give your thoughts with how much attention and focus you place on them. This is what gets us in that stuck cycle I noted previously. Our minds will often try to move us into past or future thinking if we let them.

There may also be some intrusive thoughts coming up for you during your practice.

These thoughts can often be disturbing in their themes/imagery. What's important to know is that ALL humans experience intrusive thoughts, yes even the really really disturbing ones. It's also important for you to know that they are JUST thoughts. Most people do not act out these thoughts and these thoughts do not indicate who you are as a person or your character. They are simply a phenomenon that can make us feel really uncomfortable, but that we can work towards accepting and minimizing their impact.

Guided imagery to help you with this practice:

Imagine that you are slowly moving towards a river in the tranquil outdoors. As you reach the river you sit upon a rock beside it. As you observe the river you notice leaves floating upon the flowing water, like small boats. Whenever you notice a thought enter your mind, you can imagine sending that thought onto one of the leaves and allowing it to float away down the river without a second glance. These thoughts could be words or images and you can place them on the leaves just the same, acknowledging them and then letting them float past you.

STEP 4

Give yourself a pat on the back! You've taken the first step in incorporating a healthy coping skill that can help you navigate nighttime parenting. Of course, it's not the only tool you can use but it can be helpful in decreasing some of the anxiety/stress/sadness or anger you may be feeling related to this area of parenting. It is important to note that if you find yourself feeling anxiety, anger/irritability, or sadness most of the day, every day, it is recommended that you reach out to a mental healthcare provider (FYI your care provider is an important part of your village too).

Postpartum anxiety and depression, as well as other perinatal mental health disorders, are very common and are NOT a failing on your part or your fault. 1 in every 5-7 women experience a perinatal mood disorder--You are not alone. You CAN start feeling better with help. I'll provide some helpful resource links below.

Perinatal Mental Health Resources:

PSI Helpline:

1-800-944-4773

#1 En Espanol or #2 English

OR

TEXT:

English: 503-894-9453

Español: 971-420-0294

Postpartum.net: For helpful resources and information on perinatal mental health.

Psidirectory.com: For an international directory of specialized providers.

*I hope these tips prove useful to you. Remember to be gentle on yourself and your littles. You're both learning who you are in this new world and you'll both figure it out together in good time.
You've got this!*