

Ep #19: 4-Month Sleep Regression Challenges and How Understanding Ryan Gosling's Brownies Will Help



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With Your Host

Devon Clement

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Have you heard of the dreaded four-month sleep regression? Maybe you're in the throes of it. Maybe you're expecting and you've never heard of it and you're not sure what I'm even talking about. Stay tuned to find out what it is and what to do about it.

Welcome to *Parenthood Prep*, the only show that helps sleep-deprived parents and overwhelmed parents-to-be successfully navigate those all-important early years with their baby, toddler, and child. If you are ready to provide the best care for your newborn, manage those toddler tantrums, and grow with your child, you're in the right place. Now here's your host, baby and parenting expert, Devon Clement.

Hello, and welcome back to the *Parenthood Prep* podcast. We have been dealing with some major, major thunderstorms here lately. Which I kind of love, but it's a mixed bag because it's summer and when I want to be outside enjoying the sunshine and it's pouring rain. That's a little bit less fun. But it also sort of forces us to be inside taking care of things we might not have been taking care of because we're running around so busy. So, for me, that is, for example, recording a few podcast episodes.

So, here I am. It is a rainy day and what better than that to sit down with you and talk about the four-month sleep regression. I've actually gotten a few texts recently from friends, family members and clients who are all kind of going through it at the same time. And it's something that I talk to people about a lot, and I think it's really misunderstood.

I know a lot of people know about it, there's so much out there on the internet about it. And clients, and potential clients, love to bring it up to me and ask me about it. But then it feels like the information that's out there on the internet is not really super accurate, or more importantly, super helpful.

So, what is the four-month sleep regression? First of all, a regression obviously means going backwards. And when we think about that we think, "Oh my gosh, their sleep is pretty decent and then it gets worse." Which is true, it does. But

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what it actually is it's because their brains are moving forward and developing in a forward direction. So, I like to call it the "four-month sleep transition".

What happens is they go through these several transitions at once, which I'll get into. It doesn't necessarily start at four months, a lot of the time it can start at three and a half months. It can even start as early as 12 weeks. And I think that throws people off because they're like, "Well, this couldn't be the four-month sleep regression, my baby's not four months." But guess what? It is.

So, what it is, is that their brains are going through these transitions, like I said. One, is that they are changing the way they handle sleep, from this newborn sleep all the time kind of a way to okay, we're going to have sleep cycles. We're going to have lighter sleep and deeper sleep. We're going to have longer awake periods during the day.

The difference between a two-month-old and a four-month-old in terms of awake time is pretty significant. So, their brain starts handling sleep differently, which causes them to go through these lighter sleep states and wake up more frequently than they maybe were before when they were just conked out all the time as a newborn or a tiny baby.

At the same time, they're getting into this really, really fun stage that I love. I'm not saying this sarcastically. I know sometimes I'm sarcastic about that. It's such a fun stage where they start to smile more and laugh and just be so engaged and playful and want to interact with you. It really starts to be super rewarding to have taken care of this little bug alien for the last three months... If you listen to the last episode about newborns, you'll know what I'm talking about.

So, you have this baby that maybe has started to do really well with sleep. A lot of the time, by eight weeks, babies are sleeping a good stretch. Sometimes they're even sleeping through the night. And then you get about a month of really good sleep and then all of a sudden, they're waking up.

And so, what happens is their brain goes through this light sleep state. They wake up, they're in the crib or the bassinet or whatever, and they're like, "I'm bored. Let me get my parents to come in here and see what's going on." So,

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they're like, "I'm awake." Parents come in, they say, "Oh my gosh. Hi, you are not asleep and you usually are asleep at this time. What's going on? Are you hungry? Did you not eat enough at bedtime?"

The baby gives them a big smile, and they're like, "Oh, hi, baby. What are you doing awake?" And at that point you don't think to yourself, "Oh, no, this is a red flag. This is the beginning of the end of our beautiful nights of sleep." And the baby says, "Oh, these guys are great. I want to hang out with them more. So, let's keep doing this."

Maybe you feed them back to sleep or rock them or do whatever, but you think, "Okay. This was just a fluke. They're a good sleeper," and then the next night it happens again. And then the next night maybe it happens twice. And then the next thing you know, you're back to feeding twice a night, where you're only feeding once. Or feeding at all during the night, where you'd previously been feeding zero times.

Now, suddenly, the baby's waking up multiple times a night and wanting or needing attention to get back to sleep. Whether that's rocking or patting or being given the pacifier or being picked up and rocked in a chair or whatever. So, what happens is they go through these brain transitions. Things change, and then, as a result of how we react to them, new habits are created. What ends up happening is a situation that I call "Ryan Gosling's brownies".

Which sounds insane. What are Ryan Gosling's brownies have to do with sleep? Well, I, for one, really love Ryan Gosling. I always have. I especially loved him in *Barbie*, which was just spectacular. So, if I woke up in the middle of the night for whatever reason and I found Ryan Gosling in my kitchen baking brownies I would be thrilled. I would be so excited.

I wouldn't be like, "Ryan Gosling, how did you get in my apartment?" Because I would just be so pleased that Ryan Gosling was in my kitchen making my favorite treat. And Ryan Gosling and I would eat brownies together and we would talk and it would be so great. I know he's very loyal to his wife, Eva

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Mendes, and I am very loyal to my partner, so nothing would happen beyond that. But we would have a lovely time together eating brownies and hanging out.

And again the next night, if I woke up in the middle of the night and I go down to the kitchen and there's Ryan Gosling Baking brownies again, here we are and we start eating the brownies together. And it's so good. And night after night after night this keeps happening, and it's so great. And then, I start waking up earlier and earlier. Maybe Ryan's usually there too. I start waking up at 11pm, at midnight, and 1am, waiting for him to get there.

Maybe at this point I have his phone number and I call him. I'm like, "Ryan, where are you? I need my brownies. It's the highlight of my night." And what starts to happen is that Ryan Gosling is tired from being up with me in the middle of the night for an hour. I can sleep in in the morning, but I mean, he's got kids, he's got work, he's filming stuff. He's got responsibilities.

And then we start to see Ryan Gosling is in fewer and fewer movies because he's not getting any sleep, because he's up in the middle of the night making brownies for some crazy lady in New York. The metaphor got away with me a little bit, but you understand the point.

The point is that it's a delightful experience for me, but it is not something that Ryan Gosling should have to be doing night after night after night. But am I going to say to Ryan Gosling, "No. Please, tonight don't worry about it. I don't need you to come and bake the most delicious brownies I've ever had and act out scenes from *Barbie*. No, why would you do that?"

Or that part in *Crazy, Stupid, Love* where he yells at Steve Carell for drinking out of straw. Anyway, why would I tell him that? Why would I say, "Oh, no, you know what? Tonight, I'm going to stay in bed. You just bake the brownies and leave them for me for the morning." I would never do that, and your baby is the same way.

Your baby loves you even more than I love Ryan Gosling. So, when your baby gets up in the middle of the night and you go in and you're all like, "Hey, okay. Hi, what? Let me change your diaper. Let me feed you. Let me rock you. Let me

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pat you," they're thrilled. They're not going to say, when they go through that lighter sleep state, "You know what? Tonight I'm just going to fall back asleep and leave my parents alone because they deserve a good night's sleep."

All they know, is all they know. All they know is all they've experienced. And what they've experienced is a lovely encounter with you in the middle of the night spending time together, and they want to keep doing that. Am I saying that your four-month-old is manipulating you?... Everyone's favorite controversial word to say about kids... No, of course. They're not manipulating you.

Now, when people say a baby can't manipulate you, you get to a year, 18 months, they will play tricks on you. They will manipulate you. Don't get that twisted. But in this situation, all they're doing is going along with this scenario that has been the case that they're really enjoying.

So, if you don't go in like you normally do and they start crying it's because they're confused. "Why aren't you here?" They're not trying to manipulate you into coming in, but they will learn that if you come in when they start crying that's going to keep happening. I know it's kind of a subtle distinction, but do you understand what I'm saying?

They learn by association. And when an association is created, like "I wake up in the middle of the night and I fuss and my parents come in. I wake up in the middle of the night, I fuss a little bit, then I cry and one of my parents comes in," that becomes the thing that they think they need to do night after night in order to get someone to come in and hang out with them.

Just like if I called Ryan Gosling on a night that he didn't show up and I was crying on the phone, and I was like, "What am I going to do without you and my brownies?" He might come. I don't know. Maybe he's a sucker. Anyway, that is the four-month sleep regression in a nutshell.

You create these new habits accidentally. The baby loves them and you hate them. But the baby loves them, so everybody keeps doing them and they keep happening. What do we do about that? Well, it's pretty simple. We stop making

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those middle-of-the-night wakings exciting, interesting, delightful, cuddly, joyful, wonderful experiences.

When the baby wakes up and says, "Hey my mom's pretty cool, I wanted her to come in here and hang out with me. My dad's pretty great, I want to see him and get rocked and bounced for a while," you can either not go in, which is, in the bigger picture, a part of sleep training.

I wouldn't tell you, "Just don't go in." I mean, there's more to it than that. But you can either give them the opportunity to fall back asleep on their own. Especially if they are already putting themselves to sleep at bedtime. Because, as you know from other episodes, that is the cornerstone of sleep training. If they can really solidly put themselves to sleep from awake, they can absolutely put themselves back to sleep when they wake up.

Now, does that mean you have to not be responsive? Of course not. You can be responsive if you want to be. But the more you make it an enjoyable, delightful experience in the middle of the night, the more they are going to not stop doing it. So, if you want to go in, try to be as subdued as possible, honestly, as robotic as possible. Try not to make eye contact. Eye contact can be so stimulating for them. It can wake them up even more.

If you want to put the pacifier back in, if you want to give them a little pat or a little rub, or whatever; you can respond to whatever level you want. If you've gotten into the habit of feeding them, and they weren't previously feeding, you can either just stop doing that feed cold turkey, if you can handle it. Or you can decrease the amount that you're feeding them night after night.

They start making up for those ounces during the day. If it's you know in a bottle, you can count the ounces. If you're nursing, go by minutes. And just feed a little shorter, a little shorter, until they're not feeding.

Because here's the thing, when they are feeding in the middle of the night, it's part of their overall 24-hour feeding total. So, a night here and there that they take a couple ounces isn't a big deal. But night after night, or if they're taking

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multiple feeds a night, or a pretty big feed like four ounces plus, or a full nursing session, they're going to eat less during the day.

So, if you're like, "But she seems so hungry when she wakes up at 2 in the morning," she is hungry. Because she didn't eat enough during the day to not need that middle-of-the-night feed. Does that make sense? So, if we start pulling back on that middle-of-the-night feed or cut it out completely, they will make up for it during the day and then they won't be hungry overnight.

Of course, this is not medical advice. If your baby has growth concerns, your pediatrician told you you need to still feed them during the night, do that. Of course, do that. But if you have a baby, like a lot of these parents I've spoken to recently and forever, if you have a baby who is going 8, 10, 12 hours without a feed and is suddenly looking for a feed, it's not because their stomachs can't get enough food into them in the 12 hours of the day.

It's because they've created a new routine. Do you think, after I eat brownies with Ryan Gosling all night, I want to wake up in the morning and eat breakfast? Of course not. I'm full of brownies. But if I stop eating the brownies, I'm going to start eating breakfast again. So, that's really what you need to do there.

Unfortunately, most of the time they do not resolve this on their own. These habits that get started, especially if they are not putting themselves to sleep at the beginning of the night, if they don't have that ability to put themselves to sleep, it's not going to get better.

I have talked to a sleep training family, potential clients who hired us, who have a seven/eight-month-old, a year, who say she was a great sleeper until two months ago. Then the four-month regression hit and she's been a mess ever since, and that's not great. I don't want that for you. I want you to have good habits. I want you to have a lovely bedtime routine.

We were able to put the baby down awake, say good night and see them in the morning, and if they wake up during the night they peacefully put themselves back to sleep. Sometimes you don't even know that they've woken up because

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they've just gone back to sleep so quickly. And that can happen when you cultivate these skills.

There are definitely a couple of other factors that can affect the four-month sleep regression or three-month or three-and-a-half-month, or whatever you want to call it. One is, that if you are nursing your baby primarily, the way that your body produces milk changes around the three-month mark. In the beginning, your supply was definitely driven by the demand of the baby. But it was also driven by the birth and postpartum hormones in your body.

And at around three months that can go down. So, if you have a baby who maybe was never doing a great job with nursing but was getting a lot of milk just flowing into their mouth because you had this great supply, that might suddenly decrease and then the baby's like, "Wait a minute. Where's all my milk?" And they start waking up in the middle of the night looking for more food, because they weren't getting the food that they were used to getting during the day.

This can happen a lot with issues like tongue tie or a bad latch or whatever. Where it sort of becomes this non-issue, because you just have all this milk, and then when that starts to taper off and your baby is not doing the nursing demand that you want them to do, that can affect your supply and they aren't getting as much. So, if you are concerned about that, I would definitely see a lactation consultant. Talk to them before you try cutting out feeds overnight and stuff like that.

But if that is not the case, and that's not the issue, you can definitely do this. Another thing that starts to happen a lot of times, if you're lucky enough to have a job with a decent parental leave... usually you get three/four months, somewhere in that range... parents might be thinking about going back to work. Schedules might be changing.

Maybe you're not home during the day and they're at daycare, or they're with a caregiver. And when they wake you up in the middle of the night, you're like, "Oh great. I haven't seen my baby all day. I want to go in and hang out with her." That's totally fine, too. You can do that. But if it starts to get to the point where

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it's affecting your sleep and your life, and you don't want to do it, you can make a change.

That is the biggest thing, if you get nothing else from this podcast, from any episode, it's that if you're happy with something, keep it the way it is. If you're unhappy with it, you can change it. That's it. Yeah.

So, those are some other factors that might be coming into play. There's also a lot of other different things that can be happening. But for the most part, I think a lot of those things are not the primary factor, which is that your baby's brain is changing.

Now, if you're thinking about sleep training or you have sleep trained, do you want to wait until after the four-month sleep regression? A lot of people ask me that. I say no. Because if you sleep train before the four-month sleep regression you get them going down awake and sleeping, and they're able to put themselves back to sleep during the night.

You won't even really have to deal with the four-month sleep regression, because you will know that when that baby wakes up in the middle of the night, they don't actually need anything. They're just awake, and they're perfectly capable of going back to sleep on their own.

Sometimes when we sleep train babies younger, or we've been working with a family from newborn, and we get that baby sleeping through the night by three months or 12 weeks or whatever, the parents know that if the baby wakes up in the middle of the night not to feed them.

They don't need it. You might just see them waking up. Try to leave them, if you can. If you can't, that's fine. But don't frantically be like, "Oh my gosh, what's going on? What's wrong? Something's wrong." You just know, "Okay. This is the regression. It's exactly like Devon told us it was going to happen. We need to just ride it out. And not create all these new habits that regress into habits that we had previously, because otherwise it's just going to keep getting worse and worse."

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Yeah, so that's the four-month sleep regression. I would love, if you have any questions, submit them to us on Instagram. I hope you're following us at Happy Family After. And we'd love to hear those questions. I'd love to hear what you think of past episodes. Of course, as always, please rate and review on iTunes, or wherever you get your podcasts. But ideally, iTunes. It helps other people find us. It's really great.

And mostly, I just want to hear what you think. I've been getting a lot of positive feedback lately from my friends and family members. My partner's parents listened to the episode about sex advice. So, that's great, but they seemed to enjoy it. So, good stuff. Anyway, you guys have a great day and I will talk to you soon.

Alright, listen up, folks. We love to joke around but it's time to get real. And that real talk, it's all about giving your babies the roasting they deserve. Yep, you heard it right. We're calling for an epic Baby Roast.

We want you to drop a voice note on our website and call out your little ones for their adorable crimes. Did your baby spit up on your brand-new dress the second you put it on? Maybe they decided to scream through your sister's wedding vows? We want to hear all the juicy details.

Head over to HappyFamilyAfter.com, or hit the link in the show notes. Every page on the site has a button on the side for you to record straight from your phone. Your story might just make it onto an episode of the *Parenthood Prep* podcast. We can't wait to hear.

If you enjoyed today's show and don't want to worry about missing an episode, you can follow the show wherever you listen to your podcasts. If you haven't already, I would really appreciate it if you could share the podcast with others who you think would benefit. Leave a rating and review to let me know what you think. It doesn't have to be a five-star rating, although I sure hope you love the show. I want your honest feedback, so I can create an awesome podcast that provides tons of value.

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Thanks for listening to this week's episode of *Parenthood Prep*. If you want to learn more about the services Devon offers, as well as access her free monthly newborn care webinars, head on over to www.HappyFamilyAfter.com.