

Ep #35: Night Weaning Part 2: Practical Tips So Everyone Gets More Sleep



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Devon Clement**

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Would you like to get more sleep and stop having to feed your baby so often during the night? To find out how to get more sleep for the whole family, stay tuned.

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. It is starting to be the holiday season, which I just love. I'm a huge extrovert, in case that was unclear. So all the parties and events and theme bars, and just different stuff going on, different stuff to do... I love the lights, I love the decorations, I love the food, the cookies, and just everything.

Gift-giving is fantastic. I know it can be really stressful when you have kids. Actually, for our next episode, I'm going to talk about some really good gift ideas for kids that I hope you're going to like. It's a little different from what we've been seeing with the Black Friday sales that seem to start at Halloween now, promoting stuff to buy, and my list is a little different from that. Stay tuned for that next week.

And don't forget to subscribe to the podcast, if you aren't already subscribed, so that you can get all of those cool updates.

The long-awaited "Night Weaning" part two, where we talked about, in the last episode, how to know if your baby is ready for night weaning, and now we're going to talk about how to actually do it.

What is night weaning? Night weaning basically means that you are cutting back on or eliminating overnight feeds for your baby. So for whatever hours they are in bed. For kids up to really two years old ... That's about 12 hours. Say 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., something like that ... you would reduce the number of feeds that they're having or eliminate them completely. Again, check with your pediatrician to make sure your baby is ready to eliminate feeds.

## Ep #35: Night Weaning Part 2: Practical Tips So Everyone Gets More Sleep

But assuming that things have been going well and your baby is over 12 lbs., over say four months old, you should be good to go. And you can take the process as slowly or as quickly as you'd like. I'm going to talk about some different ways to do that.

Another note I wanted to add, sort of a follow-up to last week, is that I hate this myth that if you are breastfeeding, body feeding, your baby, that you can't get them to sleep through the night, that you can't sleep train, you can't night wean because breast milk is processed faster in the stomach and your baby's going to be hungry. That's just not true.

A baby that is 100% fed on human milk, whether that's from the tap or from a bottle, is just as capable of sleeping through the night as a baby who is fed formula or a combination of things. The number of parents that have said to me ... Sometimes really upset about it, that they feel like they have to stop nursing because they want their baby to sleep and they've heard that's the only way to do it ... it makes me sad.

Listen, I'm not saying you have to keep nursing if you don't want to. If you want to stop, stop. That's totally fine. But a lot of times people don't want to stop, and they think that in order to get sleep they have to. So don't think that. Sleep training has saved many, many nursing relationships. I wish that some of the really dogmatic lactation consultants and La Leche League leaders understood that; understood there's more to sleep and feeding your baby than just saying, "Oh, they're not going to go to college needing to nurse at night."

No. And that's a long way away. I want them to not need to nurse at night now, so that everybody can get sleep. The one thing I will say is that your body and your boobs and your milk supply are a personal, individual thing. I am not going to tell you that you can go 12 hours without extracting milk in any way and feel fine and still produce enough and whatever. That's between you and your lactation consultant and your body. I think that adult nursing parent bodies are very different from baby bodies.

Yes, every baby is different. But by and large, you show me a 15 lb. five-month-old that's growing and developing normally, that's a baby that can

## Ep #35: Night Weaning Part 2: Practical Tips So Everyone Gets More Sleep

sleep through the night. I don't know what your boobs are going to be capable of. Some people like to pump before they go to bed. You put the baby down early and then you do a last pumping session before you go to bed. Or you wake up feeling really full at 4 a.m., so you do a quick pump then just to take the edge off.

Some people like to get up and pump during the night to have extra supply. That's totally fine. Again, that all is very individual. So all I'm going to be talking about, when I talk about nursing, is your baby. What you do with your body is a totally different issue. I'd be happy to talk to you about that, if you want to. Message us on Instagram or send an email. All that info is in the show notes. I'd be happy to talk to you about that.

So how do we get a baby to eat less overnight? Well, first of all, we want them to eat more during the day. But as we've discussed before, you can't just force that on them. You can't suddenly try to get someone to eat a full meal between breakfast and lunch. They're just not hungry for that. They're just not going to want to eat that.

But if you stopped eating breakfast and instead started eating something at ... Say you normally eat breakfast at 8 a.m. and then you start skipping breakfast, you're going to be hungry at 10 a.m. And you're going to want to eat at 10 a.m. So if you decide that your new schedule is to eat at 10 a.m., you're not just going to be able to force yourself to eat at 10 a.m. after having a full meal at 8 a.m. You're going to have to either reduce or cut back on that breakfast in order to eat your newly scheduled brunch or whatever.

And that's the same thing with your baby. So if they're eating overnight a bunch, they're not going to be as motivated to eat during the day. We have to pull back on the feeds overnight while increasing the daytime feeds. And there's a couple of different ways to do that. We can do it the fast way. Your baby, if they have met all these milestones and your pediatrician said they're okay to go overnight without a feed, they are not going to starve to death.

If you just say, "You know what? Tonight we're not feeding you. That's it," they're going to be upset. They're going to feel hungry. They're probably going to cry a

## Ep #35: Night Weaning Part 2: Practical Tips So Everyone Gets More Sleep

fair amount, with or without you soothing them. But they will survive. And then the next day and the next day and the next day, they're going to eat less and less overnight, because they're getting used to eating less, while filling their tummy more during the day.

Now, is this what I recommend? There's a pediatrician here in New York. It's a huge practice. They're all over the city. And when you go for your eight-week appointment with your baby, they say, "Tonight, put him in his room at 7 p.m., shut the door, and don't go in again until the morning. That's it. He doesn't need to eat," Eight weeks old!

These babies are fine, the parents are not. And it's tough. It's a difficult process. So I don't recommend that. You absolutely can do it. But what I want us to keep in the back of our minds is that that is possible. That we want to think about what is the least that we need to feed just to make the process a little smoother, a little easier, not what is the amount that we need to feed them so that they will not starve to death; because they will be fine.

If your baby is young, younger than three months or smaller than 12 lbs., can you do anything for night weaning or do you just have to feed them every time they wake up all night long? No, you can absolutely start night weaning. With our newborn care practice, we start night weaning as soon as we get the thumbs up from the pediatrician that the baby is okay to not be woken up to feed.

In the early days, say the first two weeks or so, you bring the baby home and the doctor says, "Okay, you've got to wake him every two hours during the day and every three hours overnight." Sometimes they say every three hours around the clock. Sometimes they say every two hours around the clock. And you're doing that.

Once that baby gets back to birth weight, or hits a weight that the pediatrician feels comfortable with, they're going to tell you, "You don't have to wake them up to feed anymore." Great. We're going to keep waking them up to feed during the day, like every three hours or so, because what we don't want is for the weaning to start happening in the middle of the afternoon.

## Ep #35: Night Weaning Part 2: Practical Tips So Everyone Gets More Sleep

We don't want a five-hour stretch of sleep, from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. We want that five-hour stretch of sleep to be when you, the grown-ups, are sleeping, too. Wouldn't that be amazing? Wouldn't it be amazing if you fed your baby at 10 p.m., you went to bed, and you didn't see them again until 3 a.m. or 4 a.m.? That's incredible when your baby is three or four weeks old. And it's very doable.

Again, no hard and fast rules. I'm not going to tell you how many hours every baby's capable of, but I do find it somewhat aligns with how many weeks old they are, starting around three, four weeks: Four weeks, four hours; five weeks, five hours; six weeks, six hours, and so on. Now, of course, that doesn't mean two six-hour stretches. It means one long stretch.

So the way that the night sleep develops, and the night weaning develops, is as one longer stretch. Your baby's not going to go from eating every three hours — three, three, three — to eating every four hours — four, four, four. They're going to go from a three-hour long stretch, usually in the early part of the night, to a four-hour stretch.

Sometimes it jumps. Sometimes it goes from four to six. You soothe them at that four-hour mark, and they sleep another two hours. Who knows? They are full of surprises. But that is what we can kind of expect to see.

And then, beyond that, after that first feed, after the long stretch, you're going to see probably the same; about every three hours or so, maybe four. But they're not going to do two super long stretches. They're not going to split the night down the middle with one feed. That stretch is going to get longer and longer and longer.

So the way that we do that, when we are caring for a young baby, is that when we've decided when we want that stretch to be ... So say the first stretch is from 7 p.m. on ... when the baby wakes up at the three-hour mark, the four-hour mark, whatever, we're going to try to soothe the baby however we can.

Sometimes it's super easy. Sometimes a baby starts going, “eh-eh-eh,” and you go, thinking, “Oh, let me get the food ready. Let me get mom and get her to nurse. Let me start getting the bottle ready,” and then you pick the baby up to go

## Ep #35: Night Weaning Part 2: Practical Tips So Everyone Gets More Sleep

bring them to nurse, and they're passed out again in your arms. And you're like, "Wait a minute, you're clearly not that hungry."

So as caregivers who are there to work and not to try and get as much sleep as possible, this is the crucial difference. Because as parents, you are trying to get back to sleep. And I do not blame you for that. But what we do is we say, "Okay, let me see how long I can get you to go." So when the baby starts going, "eh-eh-eh," I'd probably just ignore them.

Sometimes I might put a hand on their chest. If we're doing the pacifier, I might give them the pacifier. Once they start getting a little more intense, fully waking up, then I might pick them up. I might rock them a little bit. Sometimes just holding them still, sitting up in bed or in a chair and holding them on your shoulder. And they'll fall back asleep.

Sometimes you can even put them back down. Sometimes they'll sleep in your arms for another hour, two hours, whatever. But what we want to do, is we want to wait and see when that baby is truly hungry. Will they accept food when they start going, "eh-eh-eh"? Of course, they will.

Of course, they will. Who wouldn't? When I wake up and roll over in the middle of the night, if there was a plate of baked cookies on my nightstand, you better believe I'd be eating one. But since it's not there, I don't go upstairs and get a cookie.

So a thing you can do, when you are the parent and you are trying to get back to sleep as much as possible, is pick a night. Pick a weekend night, or something, where you don't have a lot of responsibilities the next day; switch off with your partner or a family member or a caregiver or somebody like that. Hire a postpartum doula to come just for one night.

Devote yourself to reading your baby and saying, "Okay, how long can I get the baby to go in between feeds?" If you are the nursing parent, hand off to someone else who's not nursing. Because as we've discussed, smelling that milk is going to make it harder to soothe the baby without feeding.

## Ep #35: Night Weaning Part 2: Practical Tips So Everyone Gets More Sleep

See how long you can get them to go. Sometimes they shock the hell out of us. A lot of the time they do. Even if you can get them to go 30 minutes or an hour past their previous time, that's a huge win. So really wait till there's just no consoling them, no soothing them, and they are just not going back to sleep for anything; they want that food. Then you feed them, because that is a hungry baby.

A baby that's going “eh-eh-eh” is a baby who says, “Yeah, I could eat. Sure, yeah, I'll have a snack.” A baby for whom there's no consoling, no soothing, and the pacifier is not doing it... Another test that I give for hunger is, for a baby at any time of day if they're fussing and crying, give them the pacifier. If it soothes them, then they just needed to suck. Maybe they're tired and they'll calm right down.

If it soothes them for a second, and they're like, “Oh, okay, good,” suck, suck, suck, calm, and then they're like, “waah,” ... or they're sucking on it so ferociously that I'd say it's like it owes them money, that baby wants milk to come out of that nipple. So that is also a good way to test if they're hungry.

That's how we develop that long stretch and how we work on that over time to get them to a better place. Sometimes we're not working every night with a client. So I'll be there one night and I'll say, “Wow, you know what? I know she's been waking up at the three-and-a-half-hour mark, but last night I soothed her and she did five hours. That's amazing.”

I'll tell the parents in the morning, and they're like, “Oh gosh, yeah, we're going to try that.” And then, sure enough, the next night when they're on their own, they get the baby to go five hours because they know that she was capable of doing that. So just have in the back of your mind, “I want to see how long you can go. I want to see what you're capable of.”

Then you just keep doing that every week or every few nights or whatever. Say, “I'm not going to feed you at the five-hour mark,” the six-hour mark. “I want to see how long you can go.” Usually, the first stretch of the night is the easiest one to get to be longer.



## Ep #35: Night Weaning Part 2: Practical Tips So Everyone Gets More Sleep

Something you can also do is a dream feed. And I've talked about this before in a different context. But it's actually relevant here in that context as well. When you have a small baby that still needs to eat overnight, sometimes we do a dream feed so that we can align the long stretch of sleep with the adult sleep.

So if your baby goes down at 7 p.m., and they do a six-hour stretch, they're going to be up at 1 a.m. If the parents went to bed at 11 p.m., they had a nice quiet four hours but they were awake ... they were watching TV, they were doing whatever ... now they want to be sleeping.

So if we do a dream feed at 10 p.m., or even a response feed, if we feed the baby at 10 p.m., when they wake up at that three-hour mark, then we can try and get that five hour stretch to start at 10 p.m., which would get them to 3 a.m. So now you've gone to sleep at 11 p.m. and you get four hours of sleep before you have to wake up and feed the baby, which is much nicer than getting one hour or two hours of sleep.

So if you can align their feeding with when you go to sleep, that can work really well. Sometimes they're just going to be up at 1a.m. regardless. So doing the feed at 10 p.m. doesn't really help you. That's really kind of an individual thing based on your baby. You might get that five-hour stretch in the beginning part of the night.

It's nice to have the stretch in the early part of the night, you can go out if you have somebody else caring for the baby. You can put the baby to bed and then all they have to do is sit there and make sure their house doesn't catch on fire. Then you come home and feed the baby before you go to bed, and that's it.

So that is how we cultivate that long stretch with a younger baby. Can we do that with an older baby? Absolutely. I would push the envelope a little bit harder with an older baby. And when I say an "older" baby, we're talking four months plus. They may have already self-weaned somewhat. Or maybe you were doing this technique and you got them down to one feed overnight. Or two small feeds or something, and that's the equivalent of one feed overnight.

Also, if feeding is the only way your baby will fall back asleep, you do want to change that habit. So you can work on putting them down awake. You can work

## Ep #35: Night Weaning Part 2: Practical Tips So Everyone Gets More Sleep

on rocking them to sleep. You can work on using the pacifier. Anything that works for you, that is not falling asleep while eating, is going to be an improvement. It's going to be a positive change.

So if you're nursing and your baby only knows how to fall asleep nursing, of course they're going to want to nurse 10 times a night. But if you can really put some effort into getting your baby to sleep without that, then that's going to go such a long way for you.

I'll take a brand-new baby, that's one or two weeks old, and if I fed them... They're fed, they're changed, they're swaddled, and they're just wide awake ... I'm going to lay them down in the bassinet and see what happens. Not crying? Not fussing? I'm not saying we should be letting one week old babies cry it out, but a lot of the time they don't cry at all. They just kind of lay there with their eyes open and then their eyes slowly close.

And look at that, we're starting to create good habits of falling asleep on their own, without any crying or without any stress. So if that's something that works for you, then that's great.

Another option is that you can still feed them at the same time, but just feed them less. Give them a smaller feed. So if you're nursing, cut it off a few minutes before you would normally do it, say one minute less or two minutes less. And then progress down that path, where each night or every couple of nights you're shaving off a minute. Or if you're feeding with the bottle, you're shaving off an ounce or half an ounce. Or you could try to shave off more and see what happens.

Feed them only when they start to doze off. Versus our feeds during the day where we're really trying to push them to take a full feed and take as much as possible because we want them filling up during the day. At night, when they're feeding, just let them drift off and stop feeding. Say, "Okay, that's it."

Now, the caveat here is, don't let them wake up in an hour and feed them more because then we're just turning it into all-night snacking. When they wake up again an hour later, you want to soothe them back to sleep without feeding them more.

## Ep #35: Night Weaning Part 2: Practical Tips So Everyone Gets More Sleep

Or if you get to the end of the bottle, or time's up on the feed at the breast, and they're still awake and they're fussy and they're hungry, that's when we're going to start doing our strategies to soothe them; pacifier, rocking, holding, or whatever that takes. Or if you're sleep training, just putting them back down in the crib at that point. You can stretch out the time or you can reduce the amount that they're taking, either one will work. You kind of have to play around with it a little bit.

The important thing is that once you get started, you make progress. Don't just get stuck at the four-hour mark. Don't just get stuck at three ounces. A few nights later, push them a little further. See if you can get them to go longer. And at the same time, again, we're observing to make sure that they're eating more during the day, or even taking more at those other feeds.

So if they want a nice big feed at 10 p.m., to set them up for success for the night, then that's great. And then at 3 a.m. or whatever, just feed them less and less.

Another tip that I probably should have mentioned earlier is do a really big bedtime feed.

At the beginning of the night, really tank them up. You can feed them some before the bath and then top them off after the bath. Spend that whole last hour before bed trying to get as much food into them as possible.

If you are nursing, this is a really good opportunity to do a bottle, for a lot of reasons. If they're not typically getting a bottle during the day, this is a great time to make it part of the bedtime routine because they are usually willing to take a little more from the bottle. It's a little less work. It's right there. I think the parents also will encourage it a little bit more because they see there's an ounce left in there... "I really want you to finish it. Come on, let's go ahead and finish it. Let's take a break to burp, and then let's go back to it."

Whereas with bottle feeding, you're going to maybe just let them pop off when they're done and not try to get them to take more. If parents have different work schedules or somebody's working a typical 9-5, 9-6, it's a good time for that parent to spend time with the baby, do the bottle feed, and have that be their

## Ep #35: Night Weaning Part 2: Practical Tips So Everyone Gets More Sleep

routine ... for the other parent to do that ... versus the parent who's home with them all day, nursing.

So that's just something to think about as well, having a bottle be part of your bedtime routine. Or sometimes people start out with nursing and then give a bottle to top off. It's really up to you. But we want to make sure that that bedtime feed is really, really full. Which also means not letting them snack too much or graze too much in the couple hours before bedtime; much like we don't want to let them eat or graze too much in the last two hours before wake-up time in the morning.

So try to avoid that, especially with this night weaning process. If they're eating at 4 a.m. or 5 a.m., we really want to make that as small of a feed as possible so that they are ready to start the day with their first feed at 7 a.m. Of course, adjust the math to your timing of your schedule. It doesn't have to be 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. It has to be 11-12 hours, or 10-12 hours even, but we're going to say 12 hours.

I have worked with parents who wanted 10 p.m. to 10 a.m., 9 p.m. to 9 a.m. I've talked about my friend whose daughter slept from 1 a.m. to 1 p.m. You can make any timing work. It just has to be a good long stretch, which is in a developmentally appropriate amount for a baby to sleep.

Sometimes, when parents have busy schedules and you have to get them up early for daycare and then you're getting home late for work, 12 hours is just not feasible. Because you're basically coming home from daycare, throwing them in the crib, getting them up in the morning and heading out the door, and never getting to spend any time with them. In that case, you want a shorter night. You can do something like 10 hours.

But really make sure they're making up for their total sleep in their naps during the day. Who cares if they're napping 5 hours total at daycare, if it means you get an extra hour with them before they have to go to bed?

The important thing to remember is that when you've gotten your baby to go a longer stretch, the longest stretch they've ever done, you don't want to go backwards. If they do a 5-hour stretch one night, "Sorry, Charlie, you're not going back to 4 hours tomorrow night. I know you can do 5 hours. That's what

## Ep #35: Night Weaning Part 2: Practical Tips So Everyone Gets More Sleep

we're doing.” That's really going to be the secret to success, is making that progress, moving forward, and pushing the envelope.

After a couple nights of doing 5 hours, now we're going to get you to do 6 hours. Again, they might blow you away. If they're still sleeping at the 6-hour mark, let them go as long as they want. You rock them back to sleep at 5 hours, then wait till they wake up again, ba-da-bing, ba-da- boom, maybe it's 8. Honestly, sometimes they just have a bedtime in their minds and they are going to turn off like a switch.

If you try to keep them up past it, they're just going to be cranky and miserable anyway, so you might as well throw them in bed. Seven p.m. seems to be the magic number. If you miss 7 p.m., then the next one is 10 p.m. It's weird.

Listen, I've gotten plenty of babies to go to sleep at 8 p.m. or 8.30 p.m. or whatever. But my many, many, many, many babies that I've worked with, seem to get this second wind after 7 p.m. and you can't really get them to settle again until 10 p.m., which is also why 10 p.m. is kind of like dream feed time. Anyway, that's how we're going to do it.

Now, if in addition to night weaning, you're also trying to get your baby to put themselves to sleep and do a little bit of sleep training, don't jump as quickly to soothing them. Let them figure it out. Let them sort it out themselves. The way that I kind of decide when and how I'm going to do that, is I try to think about how hungry they are.

I'm going to bring back the “stoplight” analogy. If normally they're doing a five-hour stretch, from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m., and they wake up at midnight, I know they're not hungry. They're in the green zone. I'm going to let them work themselves work it out; work out how to fall back asleep.

If we're starting to get closer and closer to the red zone, where they're used to feeding at 3 a.m., that's their absolute max, then I'm going to work a little harder to soothe them.

In between that yellow zone, maybe you just do some small things. Put your hand on them, talk to them, pick them up a little bit. We'll talk about that when

## Ep #35: Night Weaning Part 2: Practical Tips So Everyone Gets More Sleep

we do a bigger episode about sleep training ... Which, stayed tuned, is in January. So think about how much soothing you want to do based on how hungry they are.

Now, the fast way; we talked about this. You could just do nothing. You could just put your baby in at the beginning of the night and not do anything until the morning. You could also pick one feed that you want to do; you want to cut down to one feed, so we're only going to feed you... We're not going to feed you until 4 a.m., and then we're going to feed you...

You want to do all of those different things. You figure out what's going to work for you. What I would suggest, if you want to do the fast way, if your baby is a little bit older, is just either quickly reduce the amount that you feed them. So say, over three nights, cut it by a third each night until it's nothing. Or, when they wake up and they want to feed, you just soothe them and that's it.

And you don't, when they start to get really worked up, you don't feed them at that point, like you would when they were younger and smaller. You just keep going with the pacifiers and the rocking and the this and that. But all of these things will work. And they will work quickly because your baby will be hungrier during the day, they'll eat more during the day, and everyone will get in the habit of doing longer and longer stretches overnight.

So that is how we night wean. This episode has already gone on so long. If you have any questions, follow us on Instagram @happyfamilyafter. I mean, do that even if you don't have any questions. Shoot us a message over there. We are happy to answer your questions. You can also leave us a voicemail on our website, HappyFamilyAfter.com, where you can record your questions, and I would love to answer them in a future episode or just in an email or whatever.

Everyone, have a great holiday season. I hope you get to see some beautiful lights and decorations and have some fun before we descend into the dark and cold of the winter. Or if you're like my Australian friends, the summer.

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.

## **Ep #35: Night Weaning Part 2: Practical Tips So Everyone Gets More Sleep**

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](http://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.

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](http://www.HappyFamilyAfter.com).