

Ep #79: Want a Happier Baby? Give Them a Schedule



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Devon Clement

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Do you wish you had more predictability in your life with your baby or child? Do you wish you knew what they needed when they acted like they need something but couldn't tell you what it is? Are you scared to implement a schedule because you feel like it's going to be too rigid or take away your freedom? This episode is for you. 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.

Today I want to talk about something that I love and I think can be a pretty controversial topic in the parenting world, especially with new babies and young babies, and that is having a schedule, putting your baby on a feeding schedule or a sleeping schedule or both. I think there's a lot of misconceptions, a lot of myths, a lot of ways to do it that are not great that people think are the only ways to do it, so then they don't want to do those not great ways, so then they just don't do it at all. So I'm going to work on dispelling some of those myths, giving some tips and strategies and advice on how to make it work really well for you and talk about some of the benefits as well as some of the different options. You know, like everything in parenting or like everything in the world, there's no one right way to do it. There's a lot of different ways you can do it based on what feels good for you.

First of all, I just want to say schedule is not a four-letter word. It does not mean that you have to be like the military. It doesn't mean that you can never go out or do anything because your baby is on a schedule, and it doesn't mean that you have to torture them, not feed them when they're hungry, not put them to sleep when they're tired, or do any of those things that I think are some misconceptions. Like there's often a misconception with newborns that putting them on a feeding schedule means making them wait to eat even when they're hungry. And the baby's crying and you're looking at your watch and going, it hasn't been three hours yet. You're just going to have to cry for 15 minutes

Ep #79: Want a Happier Baby? Give Them a Schedule

because that's when it's time to feed you. And yes, there's definitely some people that do it that way, but that's not the only way to do it, and it's really not the best way.

There's also, you know, a pretty common myth that if your kids are on a schedule, if they have a set bedtime, if it's an early bedtime, that you're just going to be beholden to that and you're never going to be able to do anything. And I'm sure you've known friends and you've known people who say, oh no, I'm so sorry, we can't do evening activities because we have to get the kids to bed. Or, you know, I can't meet you in the middle of the day because Chloe really has to take a nap in her crib and you think, wow, like, I don't want to be like that with my kids. I don't want to be so strict. I don't want to have these like hard and fast rules because it means you can't do anything.

There's a couple of factors at play. Sometimes the parents just really like the routine. They really like the structure and they don't necessarily want to throw things off the routine. Or they have a kiddo who really, really thrives on routines more than kids normally do, and there's a lot of kids like that, and they know that if they keep them up too late or they're out past bedtime, or they don't eat on time or they miss their nap, or they don't have their nap in the crib, they're just going to be a beast the rest of the day and it's just not worth it to them to pay that price. Sometimes it is.

Listen, it's like drinking. You know that if you drink a lot one night, you're not going to feel amazing the next day, but if you are out and you're having a great time and the alcohol is flowing, you're willing to risk that kind of, you know, not feeling great the next day. And with kids, sometimes you're just not willing to take that risk. You just don't want to have a crummy day the next day because you kept them out too late.

The expression, I created a monster or you created a monster. I don't actually think that we create monsters. This is sort of a hot take or a controversial opinion I have I think in the context of this expression. Some kids just are born monsters. I mean, they all are, right? They're individual creatures. They could be monsters like Grover or Elmo, it doesn't have to be a bad thing, but they're

Ep #79: Want a Happier Baby? Give Them a Schedule

individual creatures, and when you have a creature who has certain needs or certain wants or certain quirks of personality and ways that they are, you go along with that. You feed that. So we don't create monsters. We just take care of them, and that's not something to worry about or be ashamed of. Like your kid is your kid and you're just meeting their needs because of who they are. And that's great. And if that means that you guys need to be on a super strict schedule and you're not able to go out in the evenings, totally, totally fine.

So that's kind of a misconception too, that you're not ever going to be able to do anything. If you have a kid who's flexible and go with the flow, which most of them are, they're going to be able to deviate from the schedule. Another common, I think misconception is that schedules are, you know, like the military, like they're absolutely inflexible, you can't escape from them. You can never have any variability or any flexibility because then it'll all fall apart.

And actually, what I have found in again, my many, many years of experience is that the opposite is true. Having a framework, having a schedule, having a routine gives you so much freedom because if you step away from the routine, you get right back on it so easily. It's not like, oh, we had this routine for a couple of days, then we did something different, then we did something different, then we did something different. We're like, we had a routine, then we went on vacation, everything got thrown off, then we came home and we got back on the routine. Or we had a routine, we went on vacation, we maintained the routine and it was fantastic and everybody had a great vacation because everybody was getting enough sleep, eating enough and knew what they were supposed to be doing.

It's funny because in my normal day-to-day life, I am like not schedule oriented. I'm not linear. I am not rigid at all. I'm very go with the flow. I do different things every day. It is currently 2:30 in the afternoon and I'm sitting on the floor of my guest bedroom recording this podcast for you. A couple episodes ago, I recorded it at 2:30 in the morning. I am not a scheduled person, but when it comes to babies and kids, I love schedules and routines. I think that everybody thrives on them, especially babies. They know when their needs are going to get met. You know what they need and want at each different time.

Ep #79: Want a Happier Baby? Give Them a Schedule

So if you're not on a schedule or a routine and you're just going, okay, she's crying, I don't know what she needs. Maybe she's hungry, maybe she's tired, maybe she's bored, maybe she's sick. I don't know. That's going to make your life really difficult. But, you know, if you say to yourself, oh, it's 1:00. It's about to be feeding time. She starts to get fussy, you're like, oh, well, you're hungry. Of course you're going to be fussy. I'm going to feed you. It's time for that. You just have such a better idea of what they want and need at different times.

Back to what I was saying earlier, that fear that you're going to have to let them be hungry or let them be tired, that's not true. A lot of implementing a schedule is about getting ahead of the game and meeting their needs first, meeting them before they even realize that they're lacking so that everyone can just be happier overall and you're not spending all this time going, okay, what's wrong? You know, trying everything under the sun to get them to calm down. Not only babies, but little kids love a routine so much. Bigger kids love a routine so much. Just knowing what to do, just having that predictability.

I used to be a teacher. I taught preschool and kindergarten, special education, so it was a very mixed group of kids of all different ages, all different abilities, and they thrived on our routines, knowing just exactly what to do and when to do it. We didn't have fights about some of the things that they would fight with their parents about at home because it was just the routine. It was just how we did things and all the other kids were doing the things at the same time.

A few years ago, I sleep trained a six-year-old. She was lovely. She was like the sweetest kid. And her parents were both also lovely, both creative types. I forget exactly what they did for work, but it was like pretty artsy. And she was an only child and she was struggling with going to sleep, stalling a lot at bedtime. We're going to do an episode about this, by the way. You know, taking forever to fall asleep, waking up multiple times a night and they just really wanted some help. So they called me in as a sleep trainer and I went there and I started asking them questions. Okay, what does the bedtime routine look like? Well, it depends. I was like, okay. Where do you usually like read books before bed? Well, it depends. I was like, okay, I'm starting to see the picture here. This kid

Ep #79: Want a Happier Baby? Give Them a Schedule

needed structure. She needed routine. There was a lot of other things we implemented, but more than anything else, she needed structure.

So what I do with older kids is I will actually map out their routine on a piece of paper. I will draw it with boxes. You know, they will get stickers for each step of the way. I will draw a little stick figure of them doing it or if they want to draw it, I let them draw it. And so we made this routine of what the night was going to look like, you know, brush teeth, put pajamas on, read books, get in bed, etcetera. And so we did that, we went through the first bedtime, it was amazing. And then in the morning, she came to me with the paper and clipboard that I had been using and she said, can we make a routine for the morning? And so we did. And then she said, can we make a routine for the weekends? I was like, of course. This kid had these lovely artsy creative parents who just did not have any kind of routine or structure at all. And she was dying for one. She was desperate to know what to expect, to know what the steps were. So it was almost like she and I together sleep trained her parents, which honestly is the case a lot of the time.

So that's all to say that kids just really thrive on those routines and schedules and honestly, you do too as an adult. Like I said, I hate schedules and routines in my everyday life, but I love them when I am taking care of a kid because it just takes away so much of the cognitive load, the extra mental work, the extra emotional work. What is going on here? The decision fatigue of what do I do now? What do I do now? What does she need now? What do I do now? Because you just know when you're on a routine, you just know. It's so lovely.

So I want to talk about particularly implementing a schedule with a baby, a young baby. It can work great with, you know, maybe not like a brand new newborn, although you are usually waking them to feed at certain intervals just to make sure that they're gaining weight, but I don't mind starting to implement routines in that first couple of weeks, like three weeks, four weeks, somewhere in there and really just getting things going. And the schedule that I love to implement, the thing that feels really good to me, I call bookend scheduling. It gives you a lot of flexibility. You can do things at whatever times you want, kind of within reason, which I'll tell you about.

Ep #79: Want a Happier Baby? Give Them a Schedule

But basically, you want to start your day at the same time every day and you want to end your day at the same time every day. So you want to divide the day, 24 hours into two 12-hour chunks. A lot of people choose 7 to 7. The day is 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. The night is 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. but you can do whatever works for you. 8 to 8, 9 to 9, 10 to 10. 11:15 to 11:15.

You'll probably hear me talk about her a lot, but I have a friend who is Cuban and she and her husband both have like evening jobs and just culturally, they're just night owls. Her whole family is. So when her daughter was little, was a baby, literally a baby, a toddler, she would go to bed at midnight and wake up at noon. And that was great for them. She would, you know, have her nap from like 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. and then she'd do her dinner at like 10:00. And that was just the routine that worked for their family and it worked great.

So as long as you're giving them that like 12-hour stretch to sleep overnight, even if they're waking up to feed, you know, whatever, you're dividing the day into 12-hour increments. And I would say I would do that up until like two, two and a half, even three. Depending on the kiddo, some kids really still like to get that 11 or 12 hours of sleep through toddlerhood and into the preschool years before that starts going down. And then when that does start going down, it's the same thing. You just have a 10-hour night instead of a 12-hour night.

So, book end scheduling. You implement a bedtime routine that happens at the same time every night. What does that look like? It can look however you want. For me with a little baby, it usually looks like a bath, if we're doing a bath. Don't have to do it every night. You know, it can be discouraged because of their skin, but once they're older and they're eating solid food, you kind of have to do it every night because it's real messy. So, you know, bath, change into pajamas, change into night diaper, swaddle and feed. Even if they fed not super long ago, and we're going to talk about that, you want to do that last feed as part of the routine. I like to play some soothing music during this routine. I have, you know, a playlist I put together of like soft songs and like lullabies I really like. You can do that. I think that can also really cue both the parents and the kids that it's time to start moving into the next stage of the routine. Oh, we put on the bedtime playlist, time to start doing that. And it just helps everybody be really calm, which

Ep #79: Want a Happier Baby? Give Them a Schedule

as I've talked about in previous episodes, can really help the kids be calm and get ready for sleep as well.

So you do your nighttime routine, you feed them, you get them to sleep, whatever that looks like, and they're in bed. And then they're in bed aside from waking up for feedings for the duration. So they're in their room or in your room, wherever they're sleeping, they're not coming out to the living room, they're not waking up and having playtime until 11:00 p.m. They're not, you know, out with the TV on and all the lights on and all the activity when they're trying to sleep. They're in their sleeping space.

And then overnight, you're going to, you know, let them go as long as they can go, assuming your pediatrician says it's okay, and you're going to start stretching out those intervals between feedings overnight. So once you get the okay from the pediatrician, we're not going to be feeding, waking them overnight every three hours. Now, isn't that going to throw off the daytime feedings? It could, except we have the other bookend, which is the morning. So when they start the day in the morning, you're going to feed them even if they just fed two hours ago, even if it hasn't been three hours. You know, if they woke up and fed at five, and now it's seven and that's when you want to start your day, go ahead and feed them again because that's going to start your day. Now, you have some wiggle room. Of course, if they ate at six or 6:30, you're not going to feed them again at seven. You're going to kind of call that starting your day. So you can give it a little bit of leeway there, but just have in your mind like, okay, we're starting the day with the first feed. This is what time we're doing it.

Make sure they're eating plenty. You know, with a bottle, it's easy to tell, but if you're nursing, make sure that they're, you know, focused and not distracted. If they don't finish the bottle or you feel like they haven't nursed super well, offer it again in 10 or 15 minutes or 30 minutes. Like I don't consider that snacking. I consider it just giving them an opportunity to finish their meal. I know when I'm eating a meal, I don't necessarily want to scarf the whole thing down in one go. I might want to, you know, take a few bites. I might want to have an appetizer, then take a break and have my entree. It's still all the same meal. I'm still sitting

Ep #79: Want a Happier Baby? Give Them a Schedule

at the table. It's just not, you know, start to finish all in one bite. So don't give up on making sure that they're eating plenty.

You know, if you're nursing and you feel like they're very sleepy at your chest or at the breast, then you can do like a compression, squirt some milk into their mouth, which will either get them to start eating again or have them be like, nope, I'm really done. Goodbye. If you're doing a bottle and they're absolutely sucking the bottle dry every last drop, give them more, offer them more, offer a larger amount next time. That's how you can usually tell that they want to eat more is that they're finishing, you know, what's offered to them. So starting the day with that, making sure they're eating plenty, they're going to naturally go a pretty good duration, usually about three hours.

I know every baby's different, but just biologically, a lot of the time, three hours is when they're ready to eat again. Now, this is on the younger side. When we get up into like four months, five months, six months, then I would probably start looking at stretching it out to four hours, but that's up to you. That's also something we can talk about on a later episode. But when you start the day at the same time and then you give them a full feed, then they're hungry again around the same time. So your day starts to fall into a set routine, whether that's every four hours, every three hours, somewhere in between. Again, you've got some flexibility, you've got some variability there, and that's great.

And then you march through the day and you do your bedtime again at the same time. Another thing is that the way our brains handle sleep, especially kids, they really like to have a bedtime that's the same every night. So they kind of put a pin in that and build their whole circadian rhythms around it, which you would probably find. Some nights you're like, oh my gosh, she's so tired. I bet she's going to fall asleep super early. And then they don't. They still go to sleep at the normal time. Or maybe they take a super late nap and you're like, oh no, she's never going to go to sleep. And then they go to sleep at their normal time, no matter what. Again, not always true, but a lot of the time, this is true and this is how it works.

Ep #79: Want a Happier Baby? Give Them a Schedule

I like to handle sleep and napping schedules differently from feeding schedules. I think they're two separate things. Their wake intervals are not necessarily lining up with their in between feeding intervals. So if you're following a routine like this super popular easy routine, EASY, I think the baby whisperer came up with it like, I don't know, 20 years ago or something. I like the concept that you feed them when they wake up rather than getting them used to feeding right before they fall asleep because then they'll only want to feed to sleep. But what ends up happening when you do that is that you don't have set feeding times. They might be feeding when they're not super hungry, or they might be taking super short naps because they are hungry and they're waking up to eat.

So for instance, if you have like a six-month-old and you feed them when they wake up from the first nap and then they play for two hours and then they go down for another nap and they're going to be hungry at the three and a half hour mark, which is pretty common. By the time they fall asleep, maybe it's two and a half hours, then they're starting to get hungry 45 minutes later. Next thing you know, you have a baby who's napping 45 minutes because they're hungry and they're not full. So I like to make sure that they are being fed at pretty set intervals and that those intervals are not falling into the middle of a nap. So sometimes that means you have to split a feed or give them a feed a little bit early.

But just be aware of that if you are implementing a schedule like that, that their naps and their feeds are working together and that your wake windows and wake intervals are not so long that they're going to be hungry in the middle of the nap. And if they are, that you can then feed them some before they go down to sleep just so that they have a full tummy and they will actually take a better nap.

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Ep #79: Want a Happier Baby? Give Them a Schedule

any questions or thoughts you might have, and you can roast your baby. Talk to you soon.

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.