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### FOUR TO SIX MONTHS

You did then what you knew how to do, and when you knew better you did better.

*Maya Angelou*

Over the first few months you will see that life with your new baby changes almost daily as the little one grows and develops. By four months of age your baby will be smiling at you and will become more expressive and vocal. He or she will react to your face and voice and start to have those delicious little conversations of ‘nonsense’ with you.

Physically, your infant will be much stronger and, by now, will be beginning to master head control. At this time babies will start to hold their heads up when engaged in tummy time. Some babies can even roll from their fronts to their backs at this point. Generally, babies at this stage will not roll from their backs to their fronts, so there is usually no fear of them doing this during the night or during naps – yet!

Many babies start to sleep for longer periods at night, even up to six hours at a time, which is great news for parents – but again, don’t stress if your baby doesn’t do this. This simply might not be your baby’s ‘normal’ just yet.

### **Feeds: what is ‘normal’ at this stage?**

At around four to six months old, your little one will probably still be feeding at three- to four-hour intervals (including night feeds). But by this age your baby will have managed to adjust to an understanding of day and night, and will spend the majority of the hours between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. in the ‘land of nod’. However, bear in mind that when managing a transition to a new developmental stage your little one may need extra milk, so don’t withhold this, even if you have had an apparent routine in place up to now.

### **Bottle feeding: four to six months**

Between four and six months you will surely see a pattern developing. Baby will start to take feeds at regular four-hour intervals, give or take half an hour either side. Up to six months of age you will see your little one’s intake increase to approximately 6 fluid ounces (180 millilitres) per feed.

### **The dream feed**

A dream feed should happen about three to four hours after baby goes down for the night. It is a simple feed, whereby you lift the little one and offer a breast or bottle feed. The beauty of this is that, if you want to, you can go to bed early, and then – at around 10.30 or 11 p.m. – dad, on his way to bed, could offer this feed from a bottle. In this way mum can sleep uninterrupted for up to seven hours, without having to feed during the night.

Put simply, this ‘dream feed’ entails picking the baby up while he or she is still asleep, offering a feed, and then placing the baby back in the cot with as little disruption as possible. More often

than not, babies don't really need to be winded after this feed, as they are quite relaxed and barely aware of it even happening. For children aged around six or seven months and older, I would suggest not even changing their nappy at this time, as this can rouse them – and you definitely don't want that happening!

Some babies can be extremely sleepy when you lift them for this 'dream feed', and parents often worry that they are not managing to get them to drink enough. It can be difficult to encourage them to drink, or indeed latch on if you are breastfeeding, and they can be equally as determined not to drink from a bottle.

### Tips for rousing, without wakening, your baby

- Stimulate the inside of the baby's cheek with the teat of the bottle to encourage your baby to start sucking. Touch baby's lips with your nipple if you are breastfeeding.
- Take a piece of cold wet cotton wool and wipe it along baby's jaw line.
- Gently reposition your baby in your arms to slightly rouse the little one without waking baby fully – just enough to notice the first signs of sucking or drinking.
- Rub baby gently on the cheek or chest.

### Some typical feeding schedules and a simple routine

When things are going well, there is no need to change anything, but sometimes, maybe due to a regression or growth spurt, your baby's feeding habits will change. He or she may start to take more food, or start to feed less. I am going to suggest some typical feeding 'schedules' and also propose a simple routine that I like to

use for babies from four to six months old, before the introduction of solid food.

With breastfed babies it can be more difficult to find a ‘typical’ pattern, and it is more likely that ‘anything goes’! I believe you will find a rhythm, in tune with your baby, over time.

### Sample routine for a four-month-old

You might at this stage consider putting a little ‘shape’ on your baby’s day. Remember, the amount of food and feeding times are flexible. If your baby is hungry, you *must* feed him or her. In my opinion, withholding food is not an option; you *have* to be flexible. Don’t wait until the scheduled time if you think your baby is hungry – just feed the little one. In terms of naps, at this stage your baby should start to be able to stay awake for up to two hours or so before getting restless again and needing a sleep.

7.00/7.30 a.m.	Wake and feed/bottle
8.30 a.m.	Sleep (one hour or so)
10.00–10.45 a.m.	Play
11.00 a.m.	Feed/bottle
12.00 noon	Sleep two hours + (this is the most important sleep of the day and should be in the cot – try not to have it here, there and everywhere!)
3.00 p.m.	Feed/bottle
4.00/4.15 p.m.	Sleep (wake by 5.00/5.15 p.m.)
5.30 p.m.	Short feed if breastfeeding
6.00 p.m.	Start winding down for sleeping (bath, massage, cuddles)

7.00/8.00 p.m.	Feed/bottle and bed*
10.45/11.00 p.m.	Feed/bottle (dream feed)

*\* Many four-month-old babies will not yet be ready to have their bedtime at 7 p.m. For a few more weeks, at around 7 p.m. they may drift in and out of a light sleep, and perhaps won't settle for the night until around 9 p.m. This is perfectly okay and normal. So, don't be concerned if they are not having an official bedtime at 7 p.m. just yet.*

You will see from the schedule that unless you are feeding on demand, your little one might start to stretch up to three-and-a-half to four hours between feeds.

And yet, just when you think you have things under control, some babies might start to experience a few setbacks with their sleep. You might have had a sleeping angel, but all of a sudden things change and your baby starts waking more frequently. Or you may have a little one who was never a great sleeper, but who seems to get even worse. Wouldn't it be great if there was a reason for this? And some helpful advice? Well, luckily, there is!

### Sleep regression at four months

During your child's first few years it is normal for him or her to go through periods when it feels like things are starting to go backwards, or even just not really progressing, in sleep terms. You may look for reasons as to why things have changed at around this four-month mark and ask:

- Is my baby hungry?
- Have we not established good habits?
- Should we sleep train?

The answer to the first two questions is, quite possibly, 'Yes'. There's a good chance that you have been doing perfectly fine in terms of positive habit-building, but your little one is changing and growing fast. Babies will usually have easily doubled their birth weight by now, and will be growing further by the day. All of these changes, along with other new developmental stages in their lives, are bound to impact on their sleep pattern.

The answer to the third question is still 'No'. Babies are simply too young to start a training regime at this time, but it may be a good time to start having a little more structure in their day, as I discussed earlier in the chapter.

Now, back to the idea of sleep regression.

By now, your little one will probably be sleeping up to sixteen hours in a twenty-four-hour period – usually eleven to twelve hours per night and a number of naps during the day. Three to four naps would be normal.

At around four months of age there is a lot of growing and learning going on, and often, when there are big developmental changes, sleep can be disrupted. As babies learn new skills like rolling, sitting, crawling, standing and walking, it is as though they practise them over and over in their heads even in their sleep until they have accomplished them. Once they have mastered them, sleep returns to normal – until the next milestone approaches. Then, unfortunately, it can start all over again! This is why you hear of the nine-month and twelve-month regressions, during which sleep can again be affected negatively as babies start to crawl or, indeed, walk. These growth spurts will happen sporadically during the first few years, but this one – at four months – seems to be the most obvious and the one commented on most by parents. (By

the way, it doesn't happen at exactly four months to the day. It can occur anywhere from three to five months.)

### Recognising the signs

A few signs may alert you to this regression in your baby:

- Babies may be a bit 'off' and not as happy in their environment as before. Some would call it 'increased fussiness', but I think 'off' describes it well!
- They may be more likely to rouse frequently at night. For example, there may be hourly waking after midnight where before they were managing a long stretch and were able to sleep until 4 a.m.
- Their naps can become a little fractious. Often, too, they won't take them all, even though they may have done so quite happily for a few weeks before. They may go from sleeping for long stretches during the day to being 'cat-nappers', only catching half an hour here and there. I will talk about naps separately, at the close of chapter three, as they can be the bane of many parents' lives!
- They may change their feeding habits. Some babies will start to feed badly during the day and drink all night. You end up in a catch-22 situation: they aren't hungry enough to bother with feeds in the daytime as they have been having their fill overnight.

### Responding to the signs

I suggest that you muddle your way through these phases with a lot of patience and deep breaths. Recognise that it is probably just

a regression, and that it will pass, like most other phases. But there are ways to help make it easier for both of you:

- Accept it for what it is – a disruption and not a disaster.
- It may sound hard to believe, but this too will pass.
- If you have to, go back to rocking or comforting, which you may have done when your baby was very tiny. It will not be the end of the world and will not last forever. Remember, these babies will need comfort from you more than anything.
- Provide plenty of extra cuddles and calmness. Offer emotional security, as these regressions can often coincide with periods of anxiety for little ones. Separation anxiety often rears its head at this stage too.
- Give your little one extra opportunities to practise the new skill. If your baby is learning to roll, offer lots of tummy time. Get down on the floor with baby and give encouragement.
- In short, go with the flow as best you can. Keep a diary if you need to, and try at least to keep the bedtime consistent at around 7.00 or 7.30 p.m. This will ensure there is something familiar for your baby at the end of a potentially tough day – by that I mean tough for everyone!

## Weaning breast to bottle

There will come a time when, for whatever reason, you will want to stop breastfeeding your baby. Some mothers continue for many months, even years, while others simply ‘know’ at what point they would like to wean their baby from the breast. Of course, you do not need to stop breastfeeding just because you have introduced

solid food to your baby's diet, and it is worth remembering that your little one will need either breast or formula milk until at least the age of twelve months.

However, you may need to return to work, or have other practical, emotional or physical needs that require you to wean your baby off the breast. So here I'm going to give some handy hints to help you make this process as painless as possible. I have tried and tested these with parents. However, I am not a breastfeeding expert, so I would recommend that if you are struggling with the idea of stopping and would like professional advice, then talk to your public health nurse and see what advice is offered. There are lots of fabulous breastfeeding support groups in Ireland, too, both in your local area and also online.

### Timing is important

It is important to time find an appropriate time to start weaning. It is not a great idea to start weaning when, for example, there is an upset to your baby's routine – such as teething problems, a holiday, guests staying, or even a house move! Life-changing events and special circumstances can be quite disruptive for a little person and will only make your weaning job harder. At times like these it is best to maintain the status quo. (This applies to making other changes too, for example getting rid of a soother when your child starts playschool. It is probably not the right time for him or her when so much change is going on.)

### Take one step at a time

Unless you have been instructed by your medical practitioner to stop breastfeeding quickly (perhaps due to illness or before being

admitted to hospital), the weaning experience should feel like a process rather than an all or nothing, 'do or die' event. Your baby will be able to cope with this change if you approach it while remaining tuned into his or her needs.

Cut down on the breastfeeds gradually. For example, at the beginning, pick one feed to omit. It is probably best not to drop the first one in the morning or the last one at night, as they can have a particular emotional significance for everyone. Do without this one 'dropped feed' for a good few days, preferably a week, before proceeding to drop another one.

### Express

Express milk if you can, in order to minimise your own physical discomfort at this time. You can freeze it, of course, and in this way your baby can have your milk in a bottle – maybe from dad – and this 'bridge' towards the creation of some distance between you and your baby can be further supported in a healthy way.

However, do not express more than you need to while still being able to feel comfortable physically, as your breasts will keep producing the same amount of milk. Be careful if you are deciding to night wean and feel that expressing might be a way of approaching this. You may confuse your body, as it will continue to produce milk because it thinks you still need it. You should try to express a little though, as otherwise you could become engorged and run the risk of developing mastitis. A wise breastfeeding mum once told me that drinking sage tea can help to minimise your supply and lessen the risks of overproduction of milk when you are trying to cut back on feeds.

In short, the longer the time you have available to you to stop,

the easier it will be on your body, both physically and, indeed, hormonally.

### Ask for help

You will need the support of your partner at this time. If your partner has already been giving your baby bottle feeds (perhaps of expressed milk, or of formula), then the chances are that weaning will go more easily and become less of an ordeal for everyone involved, especially baby. By doing so, your partner will already have helped to communicate to your baby that it is not only you who is able to provide feeds.

To stop giving a bedtime feed from the breast, it can be helpful to ask your partner or a relative to take over the management of bedtimes for a while, so as to introduce a 'new' bedtime routine.

### Offer substitutes

If your baby is under twelve months old, don't forget that he or she will need either breast or formula milk to satisfy nutritional needs, so do try to encourage your baby to take a bottle/cup of formula or expressed milk. Many babies refuse to drink out of the bottle; actually, that can be viewed positively, as it is then one less thing for your baby to become dependent on!

Some parents find it's best to just go straight to a sippy cup. Chances are the baby has been drinking water from one up to this point anyway. Again, I repeat, don't force the bottle on your baby. This doesn't have to be the only alternative to breastfeeds.

### The art of distraction

Fully weaning from the breast is not necessary if you simply want to

night wean. But, if you are looking to make permanent changes and finish breastfeeding altogether, then the art of distraction might help. You will already be a dab hand at distraction techniques, and this will be a really good test of your abilities! Go out, start walking, visit the park, or take up swimming. In short, do whatever it takes to pass the time! Less time to think about breastfeeding can only be a good thing when you are weaning your baby from the breast.

Sitting down together and ‘doing nothing much’ only gives your baby an opportunity to think about, and look for, a nuzzle and a feed.

That’s not to say, ‘Stop the cuddles!’ though – they just might have to be limited for a while and well compensated for at other times. Time for cuddles will always need to be built into your day with your baby.

Your baby needs all the love in the world at this time. This is a big change for your little tot, and you will want to minimise any feelings of insecurity or vulnerability at this time.

If you are finding this process of weaning your baby from the breast difficult, do not hesitate to seek support and guidance.

### Tips for weaning

- Babies become self-aware and quite discerning as to what they do and do not like from as early as two months old, although this is more likely to become obvious at around four months.
- Don’t wait till your child is hungry before trying something new like offering a bottle instead of a breast. Your child will handle new experiences when in good form, content and well rested.

- Offer the bottle during a ‘dream feed’.
- Offer the bottle with the baby on your knee, rather than lying down across you, and begin to feed with the baby facing outwards.
- Let your little one play with an empty bottle in order to get used to the feel, look and smell of it.
- Perhaps have the milk in the bottle slightly warmed.
- Your child’s mouth is wide open when he or she is feeding from the breast, so try to fill the mouth with the teat as much as you can. The ‘tommee tippee closer to nature’ bottles have a great-shaped teat, and many people find transitioning to this shape can be quite successful.

### Moving your baby into his or her own room

The best time to start the move out of your room and into the baby’s own room is when the baby is younger, rather than older. As I stated earlier, most of the official guidelines recommend that you and your baby sleep in the same room until the little one is six months old. Many will have made the move before this for various reasons, but most people wait until the six-month mark. There are some babies who are simply ‘noisy sleepers’ and are ‘evicted’ quite early on. (I don’t believe that parents who decide to make the move early are bad parents. They are usually just being quite practical and simply want everyone to have as good a night’s sleep as possible!)

The longer you leave it, though, the harder it is going to be to remove your baby from his or her recognised place of sleep. Also, as your baby gets older and more aware of their surroundings,

chances are you are waking them as often as they wake you. You may grumble or groan in your sleep just as the baby switches from one cycle to another, and, hey presto, baby is awake! The little one thinks you're up and it's party time! Noooooo!

Having said this, *you* have to be ready too. It is your choice. Don't feel bullied or pressurised into moving your baby unless you are ready.

As an 'in between' or transitional step, and depending on the size of your bedroom, you can start to move the cot away from its close position at the side of your bed. You can edge the cot gradually further away from you and head it towards the door! If your baby is going to be sharing your room for a while, however, due to space restrictions at home, then a good place for the cot is at the foot of the bed. You are far enough away for your infant not to be able to see you directly and yet near enough should you need to tend to your little one during the night.

The important thing, though, is to make sure that the place where your baby is going to sleep at night, alone, is comfortable, safe and familiar. If you haven't already done so, you could try to put your baby in the cot in the new bedroom for the daytime snoozes, so that baby learns to feel secure in this new sleeping environment.

Eventually, you will manage to move your baby fully into his or her own room. Spending a lot of time in the baby's bedroom with the baby, especially during wind-down time or the last bedtime bottle/feed time, can also help the little one to feel comfortable and relaxed.

Some parents might choose to wait in the room with their baby until he or she falls asleep, while others may prefer to leave the room. Sometimes it is argued that staying with babies as they

fall asleep is making a rod for your own back. The logic behind this is that if your baby needs you around in order to fall asleep, then they will expect you to be there when rousing, even briefly, later on. And if the baby wakes up during the night, it might be difficult for the little one to fall asleep without his or her ‘association’, which is *you!*

In the end, however, it is up to you to find out what works best for you and your child, particularly as you go through a period of change.

### Twins and multiples

It’s all well and good to talk about sleep when there is only one baby, but it would be a bit remiss of me not to mention sleep issues for twins and multiples too. Although the situation can sometimes become so complex that it could be said that they deserve a book of their own!

Although twins are often described as ‘double the trouble’, this is not always the case; many parents of twins and multiples make their way through the sleep minefield with few or no issues. But often the simple fact that there’s more than one baby looking for you and needing you strikes fear into everyone! The best advice I can give you is to accept help when it is offered. Often, after the birth of a single baby, when dads go back to work, mums are conscious of dads needing enough sleep at night, so they take over the majority of the responsibility overnight. With twins and multiples that luxury is essentially gone. It’s a matter of having all hands on deck!

Remember, twins and multiples might have come into the world together, but they are individuals. Therefore their developmental

stages may not always occur at the same time. It is important to bear this in mind, because it can often be hard to plan routines in advance as the babies may each have different needs at different times. They may have arrived a little early and, therefore, you have to take this into account when it comes to milestones.

Many identical twins will have pretty much the same sleep patterns. It is more likely for non-identical twins to display greater differences in the manner in which they sleep. Their little, developing personalities will be a key factor in deciding on how you manage their sleep too. However, it is a good idea to try to get them into a similar feeding and sleeping pattern as soon as you can. Whether you are breastfeeding or bottle feeding, it might not be feasible to try to feed them at exactly the same time, but within half an hour of each other is advisable. If one twin wakes in the night for a feed when they are still newborns, it is advisable to feed the other immediately afterwards. This will also help you to avoid forgetting which of your babies you have already fed – feeding during the night can cause things to become a bit of a blur!

### Naps and night-time with twins

The same ‘rules’ apply when encouraging good sleep habits and sleep routines for all babies, regardless of whether there is one child or more than one. Your daytime will be busier, but structure can be really beneficial, as you will be less likely to end up confused. Without it, you may end up asking yourself, ‘Who did I feed?’ or ‘Who hasn’t slept well?’

Trying to achieve and maintain the same naptime for both babies will also enable you to get some well-deserved ‘time off’ for yourself – if there ever really is such a thing!

In the early days the babies will probably fall asleep straight after a feed, but once they start to be a little more wakeful after feeding, put them into their cots for their naps whilst they are still a little awake – drowsy, but awake. This is exactly as recommended for all babies at the various ages and stages of development.

### Overnight

You may find that you are lucky enough to have two good sleepers! But if you don't, you will need to decide which baby to tend to first.

More often than not one baby will look for more from you than the other. You may have one noisy baby and one baby who is generally a little calmer. My advice, if they both wake during the night and don't need feeding, is to tend to the calmer baby first. Make sure the first twin has settled before attending to your little noise-maker.

### Separation anxiety and sleep regressions

It should be noted that separation anxiety can happen at any stage in your child's first few years. Some babies or toddlers barely blink when their parents or carers leave them. It is not that they are more secure little people than others; it's just that they are independent little souls and know that they are safe wherever they are and whoever they are with! So don't beat yourself up if your little one shows signs of being slightly anxious when you leave them. It's not necessarily you – it could be them!

Separation anxiety is a pretty dramatic, but often normal, part of growing up. Sometimes it can seem to appear out of nowhere, and your usually easy-going small person will suddenly develop fears over your departure.

Children may have been looked after by someone specific, or may even have been attending crèche for some time, before separation anxiety starts. Sometimes they may even start to develop attachments to one parent rather than the other. Dealing with it and *not* ignoring it is the best thing we can do for them.

### Helping with separation anxiety

Pre-empt the early stages of separation anxiety by having regular carers in your baby's life. This might mean grandparents, aunts, uncles, babysitters or friends. Don't have too many long goodbyes – your baby will sense your unease and will react accordingly. Fake it if you have to! The initial tears will soon dry (for both of you!) and, while it can be unnerving for parents, it will pass, so try not to take it too personally.

Normally separation anxiety will happen just as you start the transition to something new – perhaps as you think about going back to work. You will be checking out your childcare options or gradually settling your little one into crèche and you may start to notice a 'clingyness' creeping in. As if this is not tough enough to contend with, this anxiety can also affect baby's sleep habits. They may become poor nappers, or begin to resist the actual naps themselves. It's not irrational – they may feel that they are being abandoned each time they are put down for a nap, and who can blame them? Provide comfort and reassurance. Stay with your baby if needs be while they fall asleep. If it helps the baby feel secure during this period of change, just be there.

I will mention toddlers' separation anxiety issues later on in the book when we deal with that age group.

Time goes by so quickly in the first few months of parenthood.

It may feel like no sooner than you have just begun to get to know your bundle, along comes a new phase in their little lives. Over the next few months, you will see them take huge leaps – both physically and developmentally – and they become almost grown-up with the introduction of solid food. It's time to travel a new road with your baby – a time where you will possibly see the most change taking place.

# 3

## SIX TO TWELVE MONTHS

A goal without a plan is just a wish.

*Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*

By six months, your baby's gross motor skills will have really developed. Some babies of this age may be able to sit up on their own, or even crawl. Their hand-eye coordination will have improved and they will be able to distinguish between familiar and strange faces. If you have managed to follow the routine from the last chapter you should find that your day is starting to take on a recognisable pattern, with eating and sleeping times fairly consistent.

In this chapter I will describe some routines for a baby from six to twelve months old, and also look at realistic expectations around baby sleep at this stage. With many mums finishing up maternity leave after six months, lack of sleep can become an even more pressing issue than before. It's not too late to start putting a plan in place.

### The importance of sleep and a daily routine

The word 'routine' is often bandied about by many parenting experts. It can strike fear into the hearts of parents, who will say, 'I

don't have a routine', or 'How do I start a routine?', or 'How do I get a routine that works for the rest of the family?'

But routines don't have to be regimental and boring. They don't have to limit your freedom. You will have time to do all the things you formerly did and still want to do. Sometimes parents get so bogged down in the details of a routine that they can end up limiting themselves with too much structure and not having enough fun. I want parents to have a good life too! A routine should be easily manageable, and really all that is needed is a schedule with fairly structured and regular feeding and sleeping times. I often say to parents, 'If you get five days out of seven on the right track, then you are doing great.' Make allowances and have some days off. That way you will still manage to achieve your goals without feeling too restricted.

Putting more structure into the daytime hours of your baby's life can have a very positive knock-on effect at night. You may be quite surprised at the close relationship between these two elements of a twenty-four-hour day. More structure and more consistency in establishing helpful routines will give parents and babies boundaries to work within. These boundaries will provide limits for little ones and their parents, and will help to create positive associations with naptime and bedtime. Increased feelings of security and comfort will go hand in hand with boundaries.

Now, let's get back to that dreaded word 'routine'!

The routines that worked well for me over the years when I ran my child-minding service have been tried and tested to good effect. All the babies that I cared for were able to slip nicely into the same routines I outlined for their parents even before they joined me in The Nursery. By being always mindful that parents