

Things That Make Babies Go Bump in the Night

A statement I hear a lot in my sleep classes goes something like, “My baby slept great until....” My goal is to provide a general list of the things that can lead to increase night wakings. These findings come from Angelique Millette’s sleep research as well as research from other developmental psychologists and sleep researchers.

Developmental Leaps: Developmental leaps are the periods of time where the brain undergoes significant growth and learning. There are 10 major, predictable leaps that occur within the child’s first 20 months of life. With each developmental leap the baby acquires new mental processing skills and will perceive their environment in a different way.

Movement Milestones : Rolling, learning to crawl, learning to pull up to standing, walking are all movement milestones that can lead to increase night wakings. It can take a couple of days or weeks for a child to incorporate these new skills into their sleep habits.

Medical Issues: Teething, ear infections, colds, reflux, and colic all have the potential to impact a child’s ability to sleep at night.

Changes in the Family Structure: Mom going back to work, increased business trips for mom or dad, grandparents coming in for a week, vacation, baby starting with sitter/ daycare and preschool. All of these changes can have the effect of changing the child’s daily rhythm and increase night wakings.

Learning and School: I find this topic interesting because it really highlights how much brain development and change can affect sleep. When a child is on the brink of a language explosion, there can be a regression in sleep. When a child is learning how to read, there can be a regression in sleep. When child goes to daycare, pre-school, kindergarten, etc., this can cause sleep regression in nighttime sleep as well as a potential regression or elimination of naps.

This is not a comprehensive list, but it does highlight the more significant factors. A baby’s/toddler’s temperament plays a vital role in how deeply they are affected by these changes. Some babies/toddlers act as if nothing has changed, whereas other babies/toddlers are profoundly affected.

What to do: Knowing how to handle these situations will vary from family to family, depending on how deeply your little one is affected by the changes. Here are some suggestions to consider:

- Offer extra snuggle time at night.
- On the weekend, spend extra one on one time (without smart phones in hand) with your child. Follow their lead with the play.

- If you can, “prep” your child for the impending changes. You can prep by talking with them, drawing pictures, pretending play about the upcoming event, writing a book for them, etc. Babies respond well to this too.
- If you are in the process of or thinking about making significant sleep changes, you may want to consider pausing or starting the process after the changes have subsided. Once your little one grows into the new situation and becomes more comfortable with their new skill set, you can drop back into or begin your normal sleep routine.

And of course, if you need help with this, please do reach out. Currently I am the only person on the East Coast who is trained in the Millette Method.