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February 5, 2007

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Learn to change your baby's internal clock

Lisa Day
Jan. 16, 2007

If 5 a.m. comes too early for most parents, take note, there is a solution. And it comes from parents who are interested in seeing a change.

Nicky Cohen, a midtown Toronto clinical psychologist who is currently registering with the College of Psychologists and who specializes in pediatric sleep, said early morning awakenings are often created by parents themselves.

Often when babies wake up early in the morning, parents will bring the baby to the parental bed. But babies don't have wrist watches, so what has started as a five o'clock wake-up time often becomes earlier.

Instead, Cohen suggested parents let their babies self-soothe themselves back to sleep. But if the baby has an internal alarm clock that is going off at 4 a.m., Cohen said parents should ensure the room stays dark, otherwise babies think it's morning, and consider changing the bedtime.

If a baby is going to sleep at 6 p.m., Cohen suggests pushing the time back to 7 p.m. Parents can also cut back the amount of daytime sleep a baby gets. By 12 weeks, babies should be getting two-thirds of their sleep at night. Within five days, their baby's internal clock should be reset.

Again, if parents like the early-morning rising or love the time spent together in bed in the morning, Cohen said that's OK, too.

"If that works for them, that's OK," she said. "I don't intervene if things are going well."

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