

Light Exposure Schedule by Age

Morning light, evening dimming, and screen cutoffs for every stage of development

Light is the master timekeeper of the human body. It sets melatonin production, cortisol rhythm, growth hormone release, and dozens of metabolic processes. Children's circadian systems are more sensitive to light than adults' — a dose of blue light that barely registers for you can delay your child's melatonin onset by 30–60 minutes. Getting light timing right is one of the highest-leverage interventions in this entire program.

Infants (0–6 Months)

TIME OF DAY	LIGHT GOAL	WHAT TO DO
Morning (6–9 AM)	Bright, natural light	Open curtains immediately. Take baby outside or near a sunny window within 30 minutes of waking. Even overcast daylight is 10x brighter than indoor light.
Daytime	Bright ambient light	Keep the house well-lit during wake windows. Don't darken rooms for daytime naps (light naps teach day/night distinction).
Evening (6–7 PM+)	Dim, warm light	Switch to low-wattage warm bulbs (2700K or lower). No overhead lights — use table lamps or salt lamps. Keep lighting at ankle level if possible.
Night feeds	Minimal light	Use a dim red or amber nightlight. Never turn on overhead lights. Keep interactions quiet and boring.

WHY MATERNAL LIGHT MATTERS

Newborns don't produce their own melatonin until 3–4 months. Before that, they rely on melatonin from breast milk (which follows the mother's circadian rhythm). Breastfeeding mothers: your light exposure directly affects your baby's sleep hormones.

Infants (6–12 Months)

TIME OF DAY	LIGHT GOAL	WHAT TO DO
Morning (6–8 AM)	Bright natural light within 15 min of waking	Step outside for 5–10 minutes. Sunlight on skin and eyes (no sunglasses on baby for this purpose — brief, indirect light is fine).

TIME OF DAY	LIGHT GOAL	WHAT TO DO
Daytime	Maximize outdoor time	Aim for 30–60 minutes of outdoor light. Indoor light alone is rarely sufficient to anchor circadian rhythm.
1 hour before bed	Begin dimming	Dim all lights. Switch to warm-toned bulbs. Begin bedtime routine in low light.
Bedtime onward	Complete darkness	Blackout curtains for sleep. No nightlights except dim red/amber if needed for safety.

Toddlers (1–3 Years)

TIME OF DAY	LIGHT GOAL	WHAT TO DO
Morning (within 30 min of waking)	10+ minutes bright outdoor light	Eat breakfast outside or take a short walk. Even standing on the porch counts. This sets cortisol and suppresses residual melatonin.
Daytime	1–2 hours outdoor light total	Parks, yards, walks. Indoor play near large windows as backup. Outdoor light intensity is 10–100x indoor even on cloudy days.
Screen cutoff	No screens 1.5–2 hours before bed	If screens are used, stop by 5:30–6 PM for a 7:30 bedtime. Tablet screens at close range are the worst blue-light source.
Evening (1 hour before bed)	Dim warm light only	Switch to red/amber bulbs or salt lamps. Overhead lights off. This is the melatonin production window.
Sleep environment	Pitch dark	Blackout curtains. Cover any LED lights on devices. OK-to-wake clocks should use red/amber only.

Preschool & School-Age (3–12 Years)

TIME OF DAY	LIGHT GOAL	WHAT TO DO
Morning (within 30 min of waking)	15–20 minutes outdoor light	Walk to school, eat outside, play in yard. If mornings are dark (winter), consider a 10,000 lux light therapy lamp at breakfast.
School day	Request window seat if possible	Classrooms are typically dim. Outdoor recess helps. Advocate for outdoor learning time.
After school	30+ minutes outdoor play	Before homework and screens. This outdoor light exposure improves afternoon focus and protects evening melatonin.

TIME OF DAY	LIGHT GOAL	WHAT TO DO
Screen cutoff	2 hours before bedtime	For a 8:30 PM bedtime, screens off by 6:30 PM. If unavoidable, use blue-light blocking glasses (not just 'night mode').
Evening (1 hour before bed)	Low, warm light throughout the house	Overhead lights off. Lamps only. Reading by book light or warm lamp is ideal. Bathroom lights are often the worst — install a dim nightlight for brushing teeth.
Bedroom	Complete darkness for sleep	No screens in bedroom. No TV. Blackout curtains. If a nightlight is needed, red or amber only — never blue or white.

Quick-Reference: Bulb & Light Guide

LOCATION	DAYTIME	EVENING (AFTER DINNER)	SLEEP
Living areas	5000K+ daylight bulbs or natural light	2700K warm bulbs at low brightness	Off
Kitchen	Bright task lighting	Under-cabinet warm lights only	Off
Bathrooms	Bright	Dim amber nightlight for bedtime routine	Amber nightlight
Child's bedroom	Bright during wake time	Warm lamp only — overhead off	Pitch dark or red/amber nightlight
Hallways	Normal	Dim warm or motion-activated amber	Motion-activated amber

IMPORTANT

"Night mode" on tablets and phones reduces blue light by only 20-40%. It is not sufficient to protect melatonin production. True blue-light blocking glasses (orange/amber lenses) block 95%+. The best solution is no screens at all in the final 1-2 hours before bed.