

# WHERE'S THE NIGHT NURSE?

**MOTHERS OF NEWBORN BABIES WHO ARE DESPERATE FOR A FULL NIGHT'S SLEEP ARE TURNING TO "NIGHT NANNIES" TO HELP THEM THROUGH THE WORST, SAYS MORAG PRESTON**

FRIENDS HAD warned Mary Nightingale before she had her first baby about the curse of the sleepless nights — the gruelling “graveyard shift” that can reduce even the most level-headed new mother to a stressed-out zombie.

“But you really have to experience it yourself to understand,” she says. “At the time it feels like it’s for ever. Those first six weeks can be pretty relentless and exhausting.”

Nightingale, 38, who co-presents the *Evening News* on ITV, and her husband, Paul Fenwick, had wanted to look after their first child, Molly, themselves. “We didn’t want someone living in our house and taking over,” says Nightingale. “But after a few weeks I felt I needed some help. The lack of sleep was tough — and the anticipation of sleeplessness almost as bad.”

She is not alone. A recent survey revealed that, on average, new mothers sleep for only four hours a night in the first four months of their child’s life.

In desperation Nightingale turned to a “night” nanny agency. For £85 a night, plus an initial £177 agency fee, a mother can buy an uninterrupted night’s sleep: a trained nanny arrives at 9pm and leaves at 7am the next morning. Like a traditional maternity nurse, the nanny will give night-time bottle feeds, or bring the baby to his mother for breast-feeds — and then, crucially, take him away again to sleep.

The Night Nanny agency was set up by Anastasia Cooke, the 35-year-old former television presenter, after the birth of her second child, Alexander, now three. Cooke has 100 nannies (including paediatric nurses, midwives and former maternity nurses) on her books and franchises across the country. Parents can book five hours ahead for emergencies but, ideally, two days’ notice is required. Most clients use the agency four nights a week for two to three months, by which time the nanny

should have established the baby’s sleep pattern. The style guru Susannah Constantine, 40, has already booked one in preparation for the birth of her third child, due later this summer.

After the birth of her first child, Freya, the news presenter Kirsty Young described her brains as “scrambled egg”. It was a triumph, she said, “if I got my nightdress off before 1pm”. She and her husband took it in turns to look after Freya in the mornings but hired a night nanny to get them through the worst. “They arrive when they say they will and gave me what I needed most in the early days — a good night’s sleep,” says Young.

Catherine Adlam, 36, a commercial director from Surrey, has always been a light sleeper. After the birth of her first child, Sam, she found herself going for up to three nights in a row without any sleep. “I was unable to drop off, knowing I was going to be woken up later,” says Adlam, who suffered from post-natal depression. “I needed support but we didn’t have parents who could help out and I didn’t want anybody else living in the house, so a full-time nanny was out of the question.”

She hired Paula, a night nanny, for three to four nights a week. “I lived for those nights,” says Adlam. “Paula knows far more about babies than I do so I felt comfortable leaving Sam in her care. She also helped to get him into a routine.”

It’s all right for some, you might think, looking at the cost of the service. Nightingale says it was worth every penny. “It enabled me to enjoy the first precious weeks with my baby, instead of feeling permanently exhausted,” she says. “It’s also less expensive than a full-time maternity nurse and much more flexible. As a typically anxious first-time mother, I found it comforting to have an expert on tap.”

[www.night-nannies.com](http://www.night-nannies.com)