

Returning to Work whilst Breastfeeding

Why continue to breastfeed when going back to work?

- Breast milk is the perfect natural and normal food for your baby and breast milk is free.
- Breastfed babies are generally healthier than formula-fed babies. This leads to less time off work for parents, caring for a sick child.
- Breastfeeding can be quicker and, with organisation, easier than using formula.
- Breastfeeding is beneficial for the health of the mother.

"I have returned to work now twice, full time. My first child was bottle-fed so I was apprehensive the second time about how breastfeeding would go when I returned. I had excellent information from a breastfeeding counsellor about different options and I'm particularly happy that I kept breastfeeding and working."

Can I plan before my baby arrives?

Arrange your maternity leave and negotiate for any changes to your working day. Find out if there are adequate facilities for expressing. You are entitled to somewhere private and suitable and should not be expected to use the toilet. Just because no one has asked before, doesn't mean that somewhere can't be found for you to express your breast milk. Contact a breastfeeding counsellor or health visitor for practical advice.

Health and safety legislation should safeguard your health and by not breastfeeding you are at a higher risk of developing certain health problems. It is in your employer's interest to help safeguard your health while at work. There are rules too about exposure to hazardous chemicals (see the Health and Safety Executive, HSE, website).

What do I need to arrange before I return to work?

Choose childcare you are happy with. Explore how different options will fit into different working patterns, such as a carer close to your work or nearer to your home. Meet with your chosen carer, explain your wishes regarding all aspects of your baby's care and introduce your baby and carer to each other.

Make contact with other mothers who have successfully worked and breastfed.

Let your manager (or human resources) know that you are breastfeeding and discuss breaks for expressing milk. If they are unhelpful, contact your union rep or equal opportunities office.

Think about how your baby will be fed whilst you are away. Babies don't necessarily need a bottle although for a younger baby (below 5 months or so) bottles may be the most practical solution. An older baby may be happier with a plain or soft spouted beaker.

Consider what your baby will drink. Depending on your baby's age and how long you will be apart this may be expressed breast milk (EBM), cooled boiled water or a combination of EBM and modified cow's milk. Offer your baby such drinks before you return to work and ideally get someone else to do this for you. A couple of weeks before you return should be enough. Introducing a bottle in the first few weeks of a baby's life can interfere with getting breastfeeding and a good milk supply established.

The needs of a very young baby, whose mother is returning to work full time, will be different to that of an older baby whose mother is returning part time. A baby of 8 months, who has started taking solid food, will have less need for milk while you are at work. Your baby can

have water or some EBM in a beaker rather than milk in a bottle. Your ABM counsellor or health visitor can discuss options with you.

Practice expressing milk and build up a small store for your freezer in advance. Even if you decide not to express enough milk at work for all your baby's needs, it will be useful to be able to express a little breast milk to prevent engorgement or leaking in the early days back at work. Expressing will also keep your supply up for when you want to breastfeed at home. Different methods suit different people and working situations. Don't be put off if you only get a few drops or don't succeed the first time.

"I could only get a few drops of milk with my hand pump when my baby was small but when I went back I found it much easier. The first day the milk took a little while to come, possibly because I was a bit anxious but after that it wasn't a problem. I used to express about five ounces every lunchtime and put the bottle in an ice cream carton in the fridge."

If expressing milk for your baby, investigate storage facilities at work. You may need to negotiate use of a fridge. Check the facilities you need are in place at work before your return date. You may be able to use a medical room or a vacant office for example.

What about when I actually return?

Try to arrange to start work near the end of the week so that you and your baby can adjust gradually to the new routines.

Expect your baby to feed more often when you are at home, at least at first. Your baby will need to do this to increase your milk supply again after you have been apart, and to 'welcome you back'. Arrange a little extra help if possible or ignore household chores until the weekend.

Try to express at regular intervals while you are at work, ideally when your baby would normally feed. It can help to have photos of your baby with you. Looking at the photos or thinking about your baby, while expressing, can help the milk to flow.

When not at work, you can breastfeed on demand or keep to the same routine as on workdays. Whatever you decide your breasts and your baby will adapt.

You may leak a little until your body adjusts to a new pattern of breastfeeding and expressing. So remember breast pads when you first return to work and it may be an idea to wear patterned clothing at first.

Get your bag and the baby's things ready the night before to give you both a little extra time in the mornings.

Tips from mums:

- Return to work as late as possible. Perhaps delay your return till your baby is a bit older.
- Maybe working part time or flexible hours is an option for a while.
- Use a crèche at work, or childcare near to your work, so that you can feed at lunchtime.
- Express milk at work and store for later use. Try to build up a small supply.
- Try to get your partner or a friend to give your baby its first feed otherwise your baby may become confused as to what's going on. If you need to give the first bottlefeed yourself, avoid using your usual nursing position and disguise the smell of your milk, perhaps by wearing someone else's jumper.
- Breastfeed when you are at home with your baby, even if you can't express and have to use formula when apart.

Remember, breastfeeding and working allows:

- continuing health benefits for you and your baby - every feed is of value.
- baby-led weaning - best for baby and best for you.
- you to do something for your baby while you are at work.
- relaxation for you both at the end of the working day.
- no worries about shopping for formula and preparing it.

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