

Plan with your employer

Be open with your employer, talk with them, and put your needs or requests in writing. Maternity Action (www.maternityaction.org.uk) has lots of information to help you and your employer. If you're going to be expressing, find out if there are adequate facilities: you'll need somewhere private, and shouldn't be expected to use the toilet. You may be able to use a medical room or a vacant office for example. Discuss breaks for expressing milk, and dedicated space in a convenient fridge to store it in. If this is new territory for your employer, they might find Maternity Action's information helpful. If your employer is unhelpful, contact your union rep or Maternity Action.

Health and safety legislation should safeguard your health. By not breastfeeding, you're at a higher risk of developing certain health problems. It's in your employer's interest to help safeguard your health while at work. There are also rules about exposure to hazardous chemicals, the Health and Safety Executive (www.hse.gov.uk) has information about this.

Childcare

Explore how different options will fit into different working patterns, such as childcare close to your work or nearer to your home. Childcare close to work might mean that you can fit in a feed or two during the working day. Make sure that your chosen carer knows what you need them to do. For example, to use 'paced bottle feeding' if baby's going to be using a bottle; how to store and use expressed milk; or not feed baby just before you're reunited, so that you can breastfeed straight away.

“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.”

What about when I actually return?

Some mums start work near the end of the week so that mum and 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 for a bit.

Some babies will 'reverse cycle', meaning that they catch up for missed feeds by feeding more at night. As long as baby is feeding frequently when you're with them, a longer gap without breastmilk during the day is normally nothing to worry about - instead of going a longer period without feeding at night, this is just happening during the day.

You may leak a little until your body adjusts to a new pattern, 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.

Planning your return to work can feel very daunting.

In practice, many mums find that the transition back to paid work goes more smoothly than they expected.

Association of Breastfeeding Mothers

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Returning to work whilst breastfeeding



helpline: 0300 100 0212

www.abm.me.uk

If you're planning your return to work, you might be wondering what your options are for continuing to breastfeed. Maintaining breastfeeding is often more do-able than mums imagine, and there are lots of benefits to doing so.

Why continue to breastfeed when going back to work?

- Breastfeeding continues to provide health benefits for you and your baby. Every feed is of value.
- Breastfeeding is a great way for you and baby to relax and reconnect at the end of the working day.
- The familiarity of breastfeeding can ease the change that returning to work brings to you both.
- Breastmilk is free and the perfect natural and normal food for your baby.
- You won't need to buy or prepare formula.

“I've 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 really happy that I kept breastfeeding and working.”

Your options

Depending on the age of your baby, your work pattern and your preferences, you're likely to have a number of options to choose from. Talk to other mothers who have successfully worked and breastfed. You can also talk through your options by calling the National Breastfeeding Helpline on 0300 100 0212.

What will baby drink, and how?

Do you want your baby to have expressed breastmilk, formula, water or a combination of these when you're apart? 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 eight months who has started taking solid food, will have less need for milk while you're at work, and can have some water in a beaker rather than milk as long as breastfeeding is plentiful for the rest of the time.

Babies don't necessarily need a bottle, although for a baby under around five months, bottles may be the most practical solution. An older baby may be happier with a plain or soft spouted beaker, or a cup with a straw. Some families like to get baby used to drinking from a cup/bottle before mum returns to work. It may help to get someone else to do this for you since some babies refuse cups or bottles from mum. The person who's going to be looking after your child may be a good option for this.

Expressing at work?

Some mums want to express at work, and some don't. Expressing at work is easier in some jobs than in others. However, even if you don't express while you're at work, and you decide to use formula, breastfeeding can continue while you are with your baby. It's not all or nothing.

If you're planning to express milk for your baby, practise can really help. Don't be put off if you only get a few drops at first. Remember too that if you're expressing in addition to full breastfeeding, there

might not be much extra milk to express. When you're back at work, expressing will be in place of a feed and you'll have more milk available to express. If you're going to be able to express regularly during the working day, you won't need a large supply of frozen milk, as you should be able to express enough milk each day for the following workday. This will allow you to keep up your supply and provide fresh milk for your baby. However, some mums like the reassurance of having some frozen milk in reserve for an emergency, or if baby needs more milk than anticipated on any given day.

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 as looking at them or thinking about your baby, while expressing, can help the milk to flow.

If you're not going to be expressing at work, it's still useful to know how to hand express if you find yourself feeling full.

See our leaflet *Expressing Breastmilk* for some more tips on expressing, storing breastmilk, and keeping equipment clean.

Different days, different patterns

Don't feel that baby must have the same feeding pattern every day. Many mums continue to breastfeed as usual whenever they are with their baby, while baby drinks from a cup or bottle when she's at work. Once established, your milk supply is very flexible, so you can do different things on different days.