
Breastfeeding and Returning to Work

Many mothers who return to work continue to breastfeed their infants by expressing milk at work and saving it to feed their infant while separated.

By continuing to breastfeed after you return to work, you will:

- Provide the best nutrition for your baby
- Make it possible to keep breastfeeding when you are together
- Keep a special closeness to your baby even when you must be apart
- Save money
- Maximize the health benefits of breastfeeding for your child
- Miss fewer days of work, because breastfed babies are sick less often

This page addresses some important things to consider when making the transition back to work.

Talk to your employer

The Affordable Care Act enacted a national law that requires employers with more than 50 employees to give women time and space that is not a bathroom in order to express milk for their child while at work. If your company does not have a breastfeeding support program, it could be that no one has asked for one.

Let your employer know that frequent workday breast-pumping breaks do not continue indefinitely. The number will decrease during the second half of your baby's first year, as he/she develops and eats more solid foods.

Some key points to discuss with your employer are the following:

- You will need to take breaks to express your milk — approximately two to three times within an 8-hour work day. How can this be accommodated?
- You will need a private place to express your breast milk. Does the company have a lactation room or can a private space be identified?
- You will need to store your milk safely. Is there a refrigerator you can store your breast milk in during the day or do you need to bring an insulated cooler for storage?

For more information, please see the U.S. Breastfeeding Committee website.

Return to work gradually

Before you go out on maternity leave, speak to your supervisor about your desire to continue breastfeeding upon returning to work.

Take as long a maternity leave as possible. This will help you build a good milk supply. When you do return to work, consider a flexible schedule or work part time for the first week or two. If you must return to work full time, plan to return on a Wednesday or Thursday so your first week is shorter.

Obtain a quality breast pump

Breast pumps come in a wide variety of styles and prices. Keep in mind that the cost of a good quality personal-use pump is about one-tenth the cost of feeding your infant formula for the first year.

A personal-use electric pump that you can express both breasts at the same time will be the most efficient. Some women also choose to rent a hospital-grade breast pump. Researching your options and discussing them with a lactation consultant prior to making a decision is encouraged.

Before making a decision, also contact your insurance company to see if they will provide any reimbursement or coverage for a breast pump. For more information, see breast pump rentals.

Prepare for pumping

It's best to begin pumping at least two weeks before you return to work. You can do this in several different ways. Many women find they produce a lot of milk in the morning. This is often a good time to start pumping.

Also if the baby does not feed from both breasts, you can pump the opposite breast. You can also pick a set time each day to add in a pumping.

At first, you may not get a lot of milk (less than a half ounce), but by pumping at least once per day, you will establish a stored milk supply. Store your milk in 2-4 ounce amounts.

Expressing your milk at work

Ideally, you should pump as often as your baby is eating when you are together. Typically, this will require you to pump two to three times within an 8-hour work day. You should pump your breasts until the milk stops flowing — typically 15-20 minutes.

How long your milk will remain fresh will depend on how you store it. Use the chart below as a guide.

Breast milk freshness guidelines

Fresh milk at room temperature	4 hours
Fresh milk in insulated bag with freezer pack	24 hours
Fresh milk in refrigerator	4 days
Frozen milk in freezer of a refrigerator/freezer unit	3 months
Frozen milk in separate freezer	6-12 months
Thawed milk in refrigerator	24 hours

Preparing your baby

If your baby will be bottle fed in your absence, introduce the bottle prior to returning to work. This is best done by offering your baby a bottle of your milk every couple of days starting at 3 weeks old.

Choose a feeding when you may normally be away from your baby and only provide a bottle to him/her during that time. This may help the baby adapt more easily to the change, as it will become a part of his/her regular routine.

Select a childcare provider who is supportive of your efforts to breastfeed.

The following are some questions you may want to ask candidates when choosing a care provider for your breastfed child:

- Are they familiar with proper breast milk storage, thawing and proper warming of breast milk?
- Do they have refrigerators or freezers where your breast milk can be stored for later use?



CONTACT US

BREASTFEEDING AND
LACTATION PROGRAM

MAIN HOSPITAL

Contact Us
[215-590-4442](tel:215-590-4442)