

# WORKING AND BREASTFEEDING

*“I didn’t want my baby to miss out on breastfeeding just because I had to return to work.”*

Mothers choose to continue breastfeeding while working not just for their babies’ health, but also because breastfeeding is good for the whole family. It provides ease of feeding on days at home, continued good health for babies, and a warm way to reconnect at the end of a long day for mother and child. It’s well worth your time to plan how to balance breastfeeding with your work routine.

## PLAN AHEAD

Start planning before your baby is born. Gather ideas from any co-workers who have breastfed their babies. Think about what your work schedule will be. Studies show that the longer you wait before returning to work, the easier the transition will be for both you and your baby.

Shorter workdays may be easier to manage, since they mean less pumping for you and fewer feedings away from the breast for your baby. Some mothers prefer longer workdays with fewer days per week, so they have more full days at home with their babies.

Make your return to work easier by starting on a Thursday or Friday as your first day back. You will have the weekend to rest and prepare for any challenges you weren’t able to anticipate. Whatever you decide, remember that you can adjust later if your first strategy doesn’t suit you or your baby.

Attend La Leche League meetings to find other mothers in your area who are breastfeeding or who have combined breastfeeding with working outside the home. You can offer each other vital support and empathetic listening for times when breastfeeding, mothering, or working becomes challenging.

Practice pumping or hand-expressing your milk while you are still at home, so you will learn what works for you. You can freeze the milk you collect to use for your first few days back at work. After the first few days, your baby can take fresh milk from the previous workday because fresh milk retains more nutrients and immune factors. Frozen milk can provide a back-up supply and peace of mind.

Wait to introduce a bottle until just before you start back to work. Breastfeeding exclusively while you are at home establishes your milk supply and teaches your baby to latch on well.

Two-piece outfits make it easier to pump or express your milk while at work. Wearing a jacket, vest, or cardigan sweater will hide any evidence of leaking. Washable or disposable breast pads can be an essential accessory to any outfit, particularly in the first weeks back at work.

## MOTHER CARE

The biggest problem working mothers face (whether breastfeeding or not) is emotional and physical fatigue. Getting enough rest is vital. Establish priorities for household work and get as much help as possible, starting with help from your spouse or older children.

Drink to thirst and eat nutritious, wholesome foods. If you drink beverages that contain caffeine (coffee, tea, cola), limit yourself to two or three drinks daily. Excessive caffeine can make it hard for you to sleep and may upset some babies.

Try setting your alarm for one last nursing just before you have to get up. Your baby can nurse (even if he’s still half asleep) so that he’s content while you dress and prepare for the day. Then nurse him again just before you leave.

Plan on sitting or lying down and nursing or playing with your baby for the first 30 minutes after you arrive home. Everyone will be more relaxed if you and your baby are more relaxed. Perhaps someone else can begin making dinner.

When you are home during the week, be prepared for more evening, nighttime, and early morning nursings. Consider cosleeping for at least part of the night, if not for the entire night. Pumping consistently and breastfeeding frequently while you are at home will keep your milk supply plentiful. If your supply drops, take a “milk day” or two with your baby. Spend the day(s) resting and breastfeeding frequently. Your supply will quickly rebound to meet your baby’s needs.



## YOUR BABY'S CARE

Choosing a caregiver near your workplace can facilitate breastfeeding. It minimizes the hours you are away from your baby, and may allow you to go to your baby during your lunch hour to breastfeed him. A caregiver may be able to bring your baby to you at lunchtime. This is especially common when a baby's caregiver is his father or another relative.

Talk with a prospective caregiver about your expectations for your baby's care. Your baby's caregiver needs to know that you plan to leave your own milk for your baby and that you prefer he not receive supplemental formula or other foods without your consent. You need to provide any caregiver with information on handling human milk. (See information in publications listed below.) It helps to find a caregiver who has experience caring for breastfed babies.

A baby who refuses to take a bottle can be fed your milk with a cup, small spoon, eyedropper, or finger-feeding device as a temporary measure. Some babies prefer to be walked, rocked, or sung to while being fed. Some babies prefer being held facing away from the caregiver to take a bottle. Others like to have the scent of mother near, on a nightshirt or other clothing she has worn recently. Your baby may prefer the milk or the nipple to be a little warmer or a little cooler. Some babies like to have skin-to-skin contact with whoever offers a bottle. Gentle persistence and patience are the keys to encouraging a breastfed baby to use a bottle or other feeding method.

## ON THE JOB

Finding a private place for pumping or hand-expressing your milk while at work will depend on your workplace and your personal preferences. Whatever your situation, be confident and direct in talking to your employer about your need for a place and the time to express your milk. Ask for what you want and assume your employer will agree. The La Leche League Web site offers a wealth of information on returning to work and legal issues.

A mother may find she wants more privacy to pump or hand-express her milk than she would have needed to feed her baby at her breast. If your employer will be setting up a separate room for mothers who need to pump, it should have a door that can be secured, access to electricity for pumps or a refrigerator, and access to running water for cleanliness. A comfortable place to sit and a table for your pump or other supplies are also important.

You may be able to express milk in your personal work area, even if you work in a cubicle. Create a private zone for yourself with a privacy screen and a "Do not disturb" sign. Face away from the entrance to your area and play soft music to help you relax or help cover any pump sounds. A cape or a large shirt can cover your breasts and any parts from the pump. Pumping with limited privacy won't work for everyone, but it's something to consider.

It's also possible to pump milk in your car, using an adapter that plugs into the cigarette lighter or power supply to power your pump. Mothers who choose this option park in a quiet spot in their company parking lot. Reading a newspaper or wearing a large shirt can provide extra privacy in this situation.

It's usually best to express milk at least every three hours you are away from your baby. If your baby is very young or has been nursing more often, you may need to pump or express your milk more frequently at first so you don't feel uncomfortably full or start to leak. Be sure to include commuting time when deciding how often to pump.

If your breasts start to leak at an inopportune time, apply firm pressure directly on the nipple for a minute or two. This can be done discreetly by folding your arms across your breasts. It is better to relieve the fullness by removing some milk, since too much pressure on your breasts can contribute to a plugged duct or breast infection. Your breasts will gradually adjust to your new schedule and in time you will have fewer problems with leaking.

## IS IT WORTH IT?

One working mother who had bottle-fed a previous baby and is now breastfeeding put it this way, "Breastfeeding simplifies many things for me, plus it helps to ensure that when I am at home, I am spending time with my baby." Another mother says, "My baby benefits both physically and emotionally from the time we spend as a nursing couple." Breastfeeding is a gift for you and your baby.

## Further Resources

- THE WOMANLY ART OF BREASTFEEDING. Schaumburg, IL: LLLI, 1997.
- Pryor, G. *Nursing Mother, Working Mother*. Boston, MA: Harvard Common Press, 1997.
- Corporate Lactation Support*. LLLI, September, 2000. Publication No. 957-20.
- The Balancing Act*. LLLI, March 2002. Publication No. 1165-17.
- Manual Expression of Breast Milk—Marmet Technique*. LLLI, July 2000. Publication No. 571-27.
- Storing Human Milk*. LLLI, December 1998. Publication No. 555-27.

**For breastfeeding support, to order publications, or to find an LLL Leader near you, use our Web site at:**

**[www.lalecheleague.org](http://www.lalecheleague.org)**

**Or phone:**

**800 LA LECHE (9-5 Central Time)**

**847-519-7730 (24-hour messages)**