

Working and Breastfeeding



No doubt about it, returning to work can be a stressful and emotional situation. You may experience some conflicting emotions: guilt for leaving your new baby and maybe being glad to get out the house and to return to “life as usual” at work.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends mothers to exclusively breastfeed for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health. Thereafter, to meet their evolving nutritional requirements, infants should receive nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods while breastfeeding continues for up to two years or beyond.

The good news is that you can do it. You will find that motherhood helps you increase your efficiency and you learn to better manage your time both at home and at work. You become more organized because there is no extra time in your day to waste!

Getting Ready

Choosing someone to care for your baby is one of the most important decisions. You may select someone close to your home or close to your workplace. If care is available in your workplace, that is ideal since you could breastfeed at work.

Purchase the best pump you can afford. It will be worth it. Or you may choose to rent a breast pump for as long as you plan on breastfeeding. The better quality pump you use, the better you will be able to maintain your breast milk supply. Select one that you can pump both sides at the same time. See our handout “Selecting a Breast Pump” for more information.



Talk to your employer about a private, clean place that you can use for pumping and where you can store your milk. Make sure you know how to use the pump. You may want to do a practice run, timing how long it takes to travel, locating where you can store your milk, and using your breast pump.

Although it is not required, you may want to stockpile some milk prior to returning to work to use as a “back-up”. About two weeks’ worth of milk in your freezer will give you confidence (about 1,5-2 liter) that you have some breast milk to fall back on if you are not able to pump quite enough as you get adjusted to the new routine.



Pumping

Plan to use a breast pump the same number of times that the baby will be feeding while you are gone. That may be 2-4 times. Try to maintain a routine in your scheduled pumping sessions. Avoid skipping or postponing pumping. Doing this too often will affect your milk supply. Do the best you can. If you have a long commute added to your work day, try to add another pumping session. The more you pump the more milk you will make, so make a priority of pumping on a regular basis.

Start the suction on low each time you pump and gradually increase the suction over the first 2-3 minutes to the maximum setting that is comfortable for you. That is different for everyone. The pump is pre-set to the strength of a normal infant's suck, so it is unlikely you will find it too strong. If you do, stop increasing the suction just when it begins to pinch. Too much suction can collapse your milk ducts and result in poor milk emptying.

Do a 10-15 minute session or watch for 2-3 let-down reflexes (time when the milk is flowing faster, then it will slow down again). Pump for 2-3 minutes after the last drops of milk. If you are pressed for time, frequent sessions are better than just one long one.

Maintaining your breast milk supply

Pump regularly when at work and breastfeed when you are at home. That is the best way to keep up an abundant milk supply. If you see your supply wane during the week, breastfeed exclusively on your days off and do a bit of extra pumping if you have time.

Eating cooked oatmeal and an occasional beer are common recommendations to increase breast milk supply. Read our handout "Increasing Breast Milk Supply" for more information. If you need additional help, contact a lactation consultant.

Leaking at work

Most women have no trouble with leaking at work, but it can be embarrassing. If you do occasionally leak, have a ready source of breast pads.



Pump directly into a feeding bottle or a plastic storage bag.

Make sure your pump kit fits you

You should see your nipple move in and out with each suction cycle. There should be no white ring round the nipple and your breasts should empty completely. If it hurts or you are not getting milk, the flange is probably too small and you need larger flanges.



Your flange fits you if:

Your nipple moves in and out with each suction/release phase

Your breast empties all over, no pockets of hardness

The flange supports the breast and areola, none of the areola is pulled into the nipple tunnel

There is slight movement in the breast with each cycling of the pump

The nipple is not sore or cracked and there is no pressure ring or blanched skin around the nipple



Storing your milk

You may choose to just close your bottle of pumped breast milk with a tightly fitting lid and put it in your purse to take home. Or you can use plastic mother's milk bags.

- Freshly pumped breast milk is good at room temperature for 4 hours. Or you may choose to chill it for the trip home if it will be longer than 4 hours. Freezer packs are handy for this and come with most personal use pumps.
- Breast milk stored in the refrigerator is good for 5-7 days.
- Breast milk can be frozen for 3-6 months. Once you have thawed previously frozen breast milk, it is only good for 24 hours!

It is a good idea at first to keep milk in small quantities until you have a good idea of how much your baby will take at one time. Milk left over in the bottle must be discarded if not consumed within one hour. You will hate to do that! Choose bottles that are not made of polycarbonate due to the concerns about BPA contamination of breast milk stored and heated in them.

Please be aware that the information provided is intended solely for general educational and informational purposes only. It is neither intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Always seek the advice of your physician for any questions you may have regarding your medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have received in this program.

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