



Returning To Work

Ideally, preparation for your return to work as a breastfeeding mother should begin long before you have your baby. While you are still pregnant, ask your supervisor or your company's human resources department for information on the company's policies and history regarding all issues relating to a breastfeeding employee's return to work.

Ideally, this may include any or all of the following: flexible work schedules, extended maternity leave, onsite child care (so the mother can make frequent short visits to breastfeed), bringing the baby to the office to breastfeed, and provisions for a private place and regular breaks for expressing milk for later use.



Your Rights

As part of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, section 4207 says that employers with fifty employees or more must provide nursing mothers with "reasonable break time" and a private space that isn't a bathroom to pump milk until the employee's baby is twelve months old. Companies with fewer than fifty employees are also supposed to comply with the law unless they can show that doing so would cause undue hardship or expense.

In addition, many states have passed laws protecting the rights of breastfeeding women in the workplace. In New York, for example, companies are legally mandated to provide mothers with a place and time to breastfeed or express milk for their babies. Elsewhere, an increasing number of employers voluntarily provide private rooms for breastfeeding mothers and even allow the baby to be brought to the work site to nurse. Larger corporations may provide one or more breast pumps on-site for all their breastfeeding employees—selling or giving each such employee a personal kit that connects to the pump. In some cases, a lactation specialist is provided to answer questions and help employees learn how to use the pump and maintain their milk supply while back on the job. In short, you may be surprised at what options are available to you. Talk with other mothers at your company about what they have been able to arrange. If not much has been provided for breastfeeding workers in the past, perhaps you and any other concerned employees can volunteer to help establish these lactation support services.

Location

The ideal location for expressing milk would have a sink for washing hands and breastpump parts, a comfortable chair with a table or desk to use for pumping, an electrical outlet, a refrigerator for storing the milk during the daytime, and a lock on the door. (You will also need a portable cooler—the kind with a shoulder strap works best—with ice packs to keep the milk chilled as you carry it home.)

Of course, many women express milk or breastfeed at work in less-than-ideal situations. If you have a private office, you can install a half-size or quarter-size compact (dormitory-type) refrigerator, available for sale or rent at relatively low cost, and wash your hands and pump parts in the ladies' room. (After work, take the pump parts home to be cleaned.) Many women obtain permission to install a table, chair, and refrigerator in a storage closet or other unused space, and they hang a Privacy Please sign on the doorknob if the door has no lock. If you do not have access to a refrigerator, you can store your milk in a small portable cooler with ice packs. Be sure to place the milk in the refrigerator or freezer as soon as you return home.

Your Schedule

You must also consider how you can schedule time for pumping or breastfeeding sessions during the workday. You'll probably need to express milk every three to four hours, around the times that your baby would normally breastfeed. Each session will last about fifteen to twenty minutes, though you should plan for slightly more time at first while you are adjusting to this new situation (the less time pressure you feel while pumping, the easier your milk expression is likely to be). Your traditional employee breaks and part of your lunchtime may provide you with the time you need. If not, you will have to ask for a little extra time, volunteering to make up that time in the morning or at the end of the day. If you foresee any potential scheduling problems or conflicts with other employees, come up with solutions ahead

of time and enlist your co-workers' support. The idea is to demonstrate to the people who work with you that as a nursing mother, you will maintain your standard work productivity. As long as others are reassured about this, they will be more likely to accommodate your needs during this time. [Back to Top](#)

When you meet with your supervisor, lay out your plans simply and clearly. Describe any agreements you have made with coworkers about break times. If you know of other women who have pumped or expressed milk or breastfed at your company, refer to their experience to demonstrate that your solutions and concerns are sound. You might also provide information on the advantages of breastfeeding (</English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/pages/Benefits-of-Breastfeeding-for-Mom.aspx>) for mother, baby, and business obtained from the United States Breastfeeding Committee, the American Academy of Pediatrics, or La Leche League websites. Most mothers find that their employers are willing to provide both a private space and use of break time. Once you and your supervisor have worked out the logistics of your breastfeeding plan, write them down in memo form and ask your supervisor to initial it and give you a copy. This will prevent any confusion or conflicts when you return to work.

Good for Business

Housed within the National Women's Health Information Center (www.womenshealth.gov) is a program called the Business Case for Breastfeeding aimed at educating employers on the benefits of providing support to nursing mothers in the workplace. The Business Case for Breastfeeding website has information for both workers and employers on creating a lactation-friendly workplace as well as resources for support in the community. It also provides facts and figures on the economic benefits to the company, or "return on investment." These include:

- One-day absences to care for an ill child occur more than twice as often for women who formula-feed their infants compared to those who breastfeed.
- Companies with lactation support programs had an employee retention rate of 94.2 percent. Companies without lactation support programs had a retention rate of 59 percent.
- For every \$1 spent by the company on a comprehensive lactation program, the company saved \$3. The materials produced to support the Business Case for Breastfeeding are available online. Through federal grants, most states have offered comprehensive training in promoting the Business Case for Breastfeeding to employers.

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