



Returning to Work While Breastfeeding

Today, many breastfeeding mothers are successfully returning to work while continuing to breastfeed. With a bit of advance planning, and commitment, you too can easily make the transition. Fortunately, more and more employers are instituting company-sponsored support in the form of prenatal education, postnatal counseling and/or workplace lactation programs—programs that provide employees with various support services that enable a woman to breastfeed and/or pump breast milk while at work. Ask your employer or benefits manager if your company offers any supportive services. If no formal arrangements are in place, discuss alternative arrangements. Some mothers coordinate with a caregiver or care facility (by either having the baby brought to them, or by traveling to the child care facility) so they can breastfeed their babies during the work day. Others pump their breast milk at work and store it for the baby's use later. Still others find a combination of both works best.

Communicating With Your Employer

Communication is the key to a successful transition back to work. Speak to your employer before your baby is born about the details of your planned return—and keep in touch throughout your leave. Though discussing breastfeeding may be uncomfortable at times, by maintaining a professional demeanor, you should be able to communicate your needs openly and easily. The following tips may also help facilitate communication:

- ◆ Explain that breastfeeding works on the law of supply and demand, and that in order to keep your milk supply up, it is necessary for you to nurse and/or pump throughout the work day.
- ◆ Discuss some of the health benefits of breastfeeding for both you and your baby—including the possibility of reduced absenteeism and health care costs due to the fact that many breastfed babies have fewer illnesses.

"I am returning to work next month," explains first-time mother Kate, "and I plan to continue breastfeeding. Any advice on what I can do to ensure a smooth transition back to work?"

- ◆ Explain how much time you'll need for breaks, and offer to make up the time.
- ◆ Reassure your supervisor that, with minor accommodations, you can breastfeed and/or pump discreetly without embarrassing or imposing upon anyone.
- ◆ Depending on your job, explain that you may be able to work while pumping (reading reports, making business calls, etc.).
- ◆ Consider providing your supervisor with background articles on breastfeeding.
- ◆ In some cases, when speaking to your supervisor, using the word "nursing" rather than "breastfeeding" may be helpful.

Note—A lactation consultant may be able to provide additional advice.

Pumping Breast Milk

Many mothers express their breast milk (using a pump) and store it for their baby's use later. If this is an option for you, you will need to rent or purchase a breast pump from a hospital, rental facility or lactation consultant unless your employer provides one for you. Breast pumps come in a variety of types, and instructions for use are included.

Note—Double-pumping kits offer timesaving benefits by allowing you to express both breasts simultaneously. By cutting pumping time virtually in half, you can complete a pumping session in approximately 15 to 20 minutes. In addition, research indicates that double pumping may increase levels of prolactin, your milk-producing hormone, which benefits working mothers (and mothers of preterm infants) who may have difficulty maintaining and increasing milk supply.

The Law of Supply and Demand

Milk production works on the principle of supply and demand. The more your infant nurses, the more milk you will produce until a balance is achieved. Breastfeeding problems occur when this balance is upset. It is the frequency of nursing, as well as the duration of the feedings, that stimulates the milk-producing glands. Nursing schedules should be set by a baby's internal clock to maintain the desired balance between milk production and demand. When nursing mothers return to work, they will need to adjust this schedule, usually by breastfeeding their baby at home and pumping during the work day, in order to maintain their milk supply.

When Should I Begin Pumping?

To ease the transition back to work, start pumping at home three to four weeks prior to your return. This will not only help familiarize you with pumping, but it will also keep your milk supply up, and enable you to store milk for future use. Try to pump when the baby would normally breastfeed. Mornings, when your milk supply is usually most plentiful, are also a good time. When starting at home, try to pump midway between feedings or nurse on one side and pump on the other. If your baby skips a feeding or nurses a shorter time than usual, pump the rest of the milk and save it for another feeding.

Before returning to work, introduce your baby to a bottle, but wait until he or she is at least four weeks old to prevent nipple confusion. Breastfeeding patterns should be well-established before offering a bottle. And expect some initial resistance; most babies need time to adjust to an artificial nipple. In addition, have the baby's father or a caregiver give your baby a bottle of expressed breast milk at times, so your infant is not totally reliant on you for feedings.

Many breastfed infants beyond 10 weeks of age will not take a bottle from their mother because they associate her with breastfeeding. If your baby at first refuses the bottle, try warming the bottle nipple under warm water, and tickling your baby's lip with it, just as you would when breastfeeding. If that doesn't work, try spooning milk into your baby's mouth, or use a small cup to help your infant take small sips in a rhythmic fashion.

Once you have established a pumping and feeding routine at home, develop a schedule for work. This will vary depending on the age of your baby and your work schedule (part time, full time, phased-in return, etc.). Mothers whose infants are younger than three months of age typically need to pump every two to three hours; women with older babies (three months or older) typically only need to pump every three to four hours. In general, if you breastfeed at least once before work, and as soon as you return home, you will probably only have to pump two to three times at work (if you work full days). In addition, breastfeed before going to bed and on weekends to keep your milk supply up.

Pumping at Work

Coordinate scheduling needs with your employer as soon as possible. Pumping takes approximately 20 to 30 minutes each session (20 minutes if you use a double-pumping kit). *Note*—If your caregiver or provider is close to your workplace, it may be possible to breastfeed your baby during your lunch hour if the baby is brought to you or if you can easily travel to your baby.

If your company has a designated lactation room or "mother's room," reserve several time slots. If not, make alternate arrangements prior to your return. In general, you will need a private room with an electrical outlet for your pump, a table and/or desk to hold your equipment, and a comfortable chair for you to sit in while pumping. You will also need nearby access to a sink since it is vital that mothers wash their hands—and the pump equipment—before and after each use to keep the pump and the milk sanitary.

Note—Restrooms are typically not appropriate because they generally lack the privacy, cleanliness, and electrical outlets that you need.

Sample Breastfeeding Schedule

Jill works full time and has established the following schedule to accommodate the needs of her six-month-old baby—and her employer.

6:30 a.m.	—	Breastfeed baby at home
8:30 a.m.	—	Begin work
9:00 a.m.	—	Take 15-minute break to pump and store milk
12:30 p.m.	—	Take 15-minute break during lunch to pump and store milk
4:00 p.m.	—	Take 15-minute break to pump and store milk
5:30 p.m.	—	Leave work
6:30 p.m.	—	Breastfeed baby at caregiver's facility or home

Storing and Freezing Breast Milk

Breast milk should be collected and stored for safe use in specially designed plastic bags, bottles or containers using the following guidelines:

Storage

- ◆ Always label storage containers with the date and amount of milk collected.
- ◆ Though breast milk will be safe for four hours at room temperature, immediate refrigeration is recommended. *Note*—Before you return to work, find out if there is a refrigerator available for your use. If not, rent or purchase a cooler if one is not included with your pump.
- ◆ Fresh milk may be stored in the refrigerator for up to five to seven days. Frozen milk may be stored in the back of the freezer portion of a refrigerator-freezer for three to four months or in a deep freezer for up to 12 months.
- ◆ When using plastic bags, use only those designed for breast milk collection. Before storing, fold the top several times and seal with freezer or masking tape. Place smaller bags in a larger bag to help protect against punctures.

- ◆ Freeze your milk in two to four ounce portions. These smaller amounts thaw more quickly, and you will waste less milk if your baby consumes less than you anticipated.
- ◆ You may continue to add small amounts of cooled breast milk to the same container throughout the day. Chill milk in the refrigerator until evening. Then, freeze in appropriate amounts.
- ◆ You may add to already frozen milk. First refrigerate all freshly expressed milk until it's cold, and then add it to the frozen milk. Keep in mind that breast milk tends to expand when frozen.

Note—Human milk varies in color, consistency and odor, depending on the mother's diet and the container used.

Intake Guidelines

Though the amount of breast milk each baby requires varies, the following intake guidelines should assist you with storage and intake—and prevent you from wasting valuable breast milk.

Average intake by age:

Age	Ounces per Feeding	Daily Average
0-2 months	2-5 oz.	26 oz.
2-4 months	4-6 oz.	30 oz.
4-6 months	5-7 oz.	31 oz.

Average intake by weight:

Weight	Ounces per 24 Hours
8 lbs.	21.3 oz.
9 lbs.	24.0 oz.
10 lbs.	26.7 oz.
11 lbs.	29.3 oz.
12 lbs.	32.0 oz.
14 lbs.	37.3 oz.
16 lbs.	42.7 oz.

Defrosting Frozen Breast Milk

- ◆ Place milk in the refrigerator the night before you plan to use it. Refrigerator defrosting takes approximately eight to 12 hours. Or, place the milk under warm running water or in a pan of warm water. Don't use hot water, as this can destroy some of the milk's immunological components.
- ◆ Defrosted milk may be kept for up to 24-48 hours in the refrigerator.
- ◆ Never microwave breast milk! Microwaving can change the milk's composition, alter its proteins and vitamins, and can burn your baby.
- ◆ Fat in breast milk will separate and rise to the top. By gently swirling the container, you can mix any fat that may have separated.
- ◆ Never refreeze thawed breast milk.
- ◆ Discard any breast milk you don't use during a feeding.

Coordinating With a Caregiver

Selecting a reliable caregiver is an important decision that should be made prior to your return to work. Start your search early and choose a caregiver who supports your commitment to breastfeeding. You will need a primary

caregiver, as well as backup caregivers, in the event that your primary caregiver is unexpectedly unavailable due to an emergency. For educational materials on how to choose and evaluate potential caregivers/providers, please refer to other publications in the LifeCare® education series.

Give your caregiver a copy of your breastfeeding schedule—and written instructions on how to store and use breast milk. If you are planning to breastfeed during your lunch hour, or at other times during the day, designate a time and place to meet the caregiver and your baby. Explain that, if possible, your baby should not be fed within a couple of hours of your scheduled visits so your baby is ready to breastfeed upon your arrival. If your baby is hungry before then, the caregiver can tide the baby over with water or a snack-sized portion of stored milk.

Keep in close touch with the caregiver and notify him or her of any changes in your schedule. Always provide emergency contact information so the caregiver can reach you in the event of an emergency. *Note*—If your caregiver needs to travel with your baby, teach him or her how to properly transport and store bottles so that the milk will be fresh and safe for your baby.

Trouble-Shooting for Working Mothers

The following questions and answers may help you understand common issues facing working mothers today.

My milk supply has decreased since returning to work. What can I do?

Causes

A decrease in your milk supply can usually be attributed to fatigue, stress, skipping pumping times, poor diet, dehydration and/or not breastfeeding before or after work.

Solutions

- ◆ Rearrange your schedule to get more rest.
- ◆ Identify your source of stress and seek help.
- ◆ Breastfeed your baby and get as much rest as possible on weekends to build up your milk supply.
- ◆ Breastfeed before going to work and immediately upon returning home. If you miss the morning feeding, pump as soon as you get to work.

- ◆ Eat a healthy diet and keep nutritious snacks in your office. (For more information on healthy eating habits, please refer to *A LifeCare® Guide: Nutrition During Lactation*.)
- ◆ Drink plenty of liquids to satisfy your thirst.
- ◆ Remember, it's not uncommon to have more milk in the morning and less in the evening. It's also not unusual to have a lower milk supply on Fridays.

I missed my pumping time. What should I do?

Causes

You may miss pumping times if you are busy, stressed, reluctant to pump due to supervisor disapproval, or if you are off-site during a scheduled pumping time.

Solutions

- ◆ Have a pre-established arrangement with your supervisor regarding pumping times.
- ◆ Post a note in your office or set a low-volume alarm to remind you.
- ◆ Arrange pump times to coincide with established breaks and lunch periods.
- ◆ Try to work pumping times into special work assignments at their inception. When possible, arrange meetings to accommodate pumping times.
- ◆ Take a battery-operated or rechargeable breast pump to off-site meetings; arrive early to pump.
- ◆ When you miss your scheduled time, check the pump room log and reschedule for the next available time slot.

It is sometimes difficult for me to pump—both at work and off-site. How do I accommodate tricky situations?

Causes

Concerns about interrupting or inconveniencing other employees, privacy, or no electricity often make it difficult for women to pump.

Solutions

- ◆ Before your baby arrives, talk to your supervisor and co-workers to avoid potential problems.
- ◆ Carry an extension cord in case you have to use a facility with few outlets.
- ◆ Arrange your pumping times so you don't interfere with other employees' break times.

I am having difficulty with let-down (milk ejection reflex) at designated pumping times. What should I do?

Causes

Difficulty with let-down can be attributed to a disruption in your pumping schedule, engorgement or an inability to relax.

Solutions

- ◆ Try to arrange your workload so that it is not overwhelming. Seek additional support if necessary from your manager or a lactation consultant.

- ◆ When in the lactation room, try relaxation activities: meditate, listen to relaxing music, envision your favorite resort destination, look at a picture of your baby, or take deep breaths.
- ◆ Place a warm, wet cloth on each breast.
- ◆ Before pumping, massage breasts. Studies show that massaging not only increases milk production but also increases milk's fat content, providing more nutrition for your baby.
- ◆ Drink fluids to satisfy your thirst.

Sometimes let-down occurs away from the pump location. What should I do?

Causes

Let-down may occur close to regular pump times, during a missed pump time, or sometimes simply by thinking about your baby.

Solutions

- ◆ To stop the flow, apply pressure with your arm across your chest.
- ◆ Wear bra pads to absorb fluid and keep an extra set of pads at work.
- ◆ Keep an extra blouse or sweater on hand to help conceal milk stains.
- ◆ Avoid missing pump times.

I travel frequently for work and would like to continue pumping while I'm away. Any suggestions?

Causes

Out-of-town business, conferences and sales calls often require women to make special accommodations.

Solutions

- ◆ Store as much milk as you can before you go. Talk to your baby's doctor about a suitable substitute, if necessary.
- ◆ Breastfeed your baby before leaving home.
- ◆ If possible, scout out your destination beforehand to locate a potential pumping location such as a lounge or room that can be locked. As a last resort, use the restroom.
- ◆ Bring your pump or arrange to rent one.
- ◆ If you are going to a meeting, notify your host that you may have to come in late or leave early and sit near an exit so there is less disruption when you leave.
- ◆ Try to pump the same number of times you would at your normal work site.
- ◆ For overnight travel, use an in-room refrigerator or cooler with ice packs to store pumped milk. Surround milk with ice if you're unsure of the refrigerator's temperature.
- ◆ If you are traveling for an extended period of time and cannot freeze milk, throw it out; refrigerated milk only keeps for approximately five to seven days. Remember, the purpose of pumping in this situation is to maintain your milk supply with regular, effective breast stimulation. *Note*—If you are traveling overseas, you may need to rent a pump unless yours works with an adapter.
- ◆ Eat well and drink fluids while traveling.

Checklist of Necessary Items

To relieve anxiety, make sure you are organized and prepared to return to work. Choose work clothes that make pumping easier (for example, tops and bras that open in the front or pull up from the bottom) and make sure you have all the equipment you need. Consider using this checklist as a guide:

- Pumping system (if not provided by your employer)
- Ample milk containers for storage
- Cooler to store milk
- Ample ice packs to surround containers if necessary
- Masking tape to label milk containers with date and time
- Extra bra pads, tops or sweaters in case of leakage
- Relaxation tapes/music, a picture of your baby, or anything else that may help you relax while pumping
- Nutritious snacks to keep your caloric intake up
- Water bottle so you don't get dehydrated
- Cleaning supplies (if not provided at work) so you can properly wash your pump equipment

You Can Do It!

Women every day are successfully returning to work while continuing to breastfeed. By communicating your needs to your employer and making a few simple adjustments to your schedule, you too can easily make the transition. For additional information on breastfeeding, please consult other publications in the LifeCare® education series.

This publication is for general informational purposes only and is not intended to provide any reader with specific authority, advice or recommendations.

Copyright © 2009 LifeCare®, Inc. All rights reserved. LifeCare®, Inc. is the worldwide provider of Life Event Management® Services | www.lifecare.com

#086_BreastfeedingReturningToWork_0309

