

Returning to Work After Your Baby Is Born: How to Prepare to Pump and Breastfeed

Returning to Work



Before returning to work, during your pregnancy or maternity leave, be sure to have a conversation with your supervisor or your Human Resources department about your needs as a nursing mother. Federal law now requires your employer to provide reasonable break time and a private place, that is not a bathroom, for nonexempt, hourly nursing mothers to pump milk at work. Offer to work with your employer to develop a flexible schedule and establish a private space that will help your company comply with the law as well as support you and the other nursing mothers who work there.

Here are some other suggestions to help you to continue to breastfeed successfully.

Get Used to Pumping and Introduce Your Baby to a Bottle

Start pumping at home 3 to 4 weeks prior to your return. This will not only help familiarize you with pumping, but also it will keep your milk supply up and enable you to store milk for future use. Before returning to work, introduce your baby to a bottle, but wait until he or she is at least 4 weeks old to prevent nipple confusion. Expect some initial resistance; most babies need time to adjust to an artificial nipple. In addition, have another person give your baby a bottle of expressed breast milk at times, so your infant is not totally reliant on you for feedings.

Pack Your Bag

Make sure you have everything you will need at work, including

- Pump and pump attachments (if your employer provides a pump, remember to bring your own tubing, flanges, and containers that work for the pump you will use).

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 usually is 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.
- 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.

- Cleaning supplies, such as brushes, cloths, and soap
- Extra containers.
- Masking tape and marker to label milk containers with name, date, and time.
- Extra breast pads (may be helpful as your breasts adjust to a new schedule).
- Ice pack and cooler.
- Photo of your baby (to help you relax and let down your milk).
- Bottle of water and a small snack for you to drink and eat while pumping.
- Something to read while you pump.
- Soothing music to listen to while you pump.
- Watch or small clock to stick to your scheduled pumping time.

Return to Work at the End of Your Workweek

Starting work on a Thursday or Friday (if you normally work Monday through Friday) can make your return less stressful, as you will work fewer days before getting a rest. As your milk supply adjusts to your new schedule, you may find that pumping sessions don't produce much milk at first. Stick with the schedule, and let your body adjust over time to the new routine. Feel proud of yourself for what you are doing, and remember that right now you're doing the best you can for your baby.

Dress for Success

Wear clothes that make it easy to pump or breastfeed. Shirts or tops that unbutton or pull up are best—tight-fitting or back-zipping tops/jumpers do not work very well.

Have a Conversation

Talk to your coworkers about your schedule, so that they understand that you will take pumping breaks for your and your baby's health. Know that they may have diverse opinions—some will understand, others just may not want to talk too much about breastfeeding. Others may take breaks for their own health reasons.

Coordinate with Your Caregiver

Make sure your caregiver knows your baby's feeding schedule, and provide written instructions on how to store and use breast milk. If you are planning to have your baby brought to you at work to breastfeed or if you will breastfeed as soon as you get home from work, explain that. If possible, your baby should not feed within a couple of hours before your scheduled feedings, 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 a snack-sized portion of stored milk. Note: If your caregiver

I'm having difficulty producing milk during my scheduled pumping times. What should I do?

CAUSES

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

SOLUTIONS

Try to arrange your workload to make it 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 a calming place, look at a picture of your baby, or take deep breaths.
- Place a warm, wet cloth on each breast.
- Before pumping, massage your breasts. Studies show that massaging not only increases milk production, but also increases the 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?

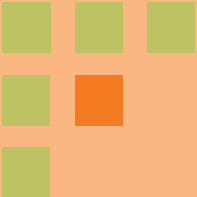
CAUSES

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 breast pads to absorb fluid. 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.

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needs to travel with your baby, teach him or her how to properly transport and store bottles, so that the milk is fresh and safe for your baby.

Build a Support Network

Breastfeeding at work takes time and energy. Your coworkers can help provide support, particularly as you adjust to your new routine. You also may find it helpful to talk with others who are using the lactation space at work. Lactation consultants and La Leche League leaders also can provide help and support.