

# The BUSINESS CASE for BREASTFEEDING

STEPS FOR CREATING A BREASTFEEDING FRIENDLY WORKSITE

## EMPLOYEES' GUIDE TO BREASTFEEDING AND WORKING



B O T T O M L I N E B E N E F I T S



# BREASTFEEDING **WORKS** FOR WORKING WOMEN! HERE'S HOW

*Breastfeeding is the most precious gift I can ever give my child!*

Mykie Nghiem  
California Public Health Foundation



Congratulations for making the healthy choice to breastfeed your baby! Mothers everywhere have found that they can continue to give their babies important health benefits even after they return to work. This booklet will help you take those first steps back to your working life.

## **Where to find breastfeeding help and support**

- Your health care provider
- Lactation consultants in your community  
[www.ilca.org](http://www.ilca.org) (click on “Find a Lactation Consultant”)
- WIC (Women, Infants & Children) Program (check with your local health department)
- La Leche League, International  
1-800-LALECHE or [www.lalecheleague.org](http://www.lalecheleague.org)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS),  
Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB)  
[www.mchb.hrsa.gov/pregnancyandbeyond](http://www.mchb.hrsa.gov/pregnancyandbeyond)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)/Office on Women’s Health  
1-800-994-WOMAN (9662) or [www.womenshealth.gov](http://www.womenshealth.gov)
- Pumping Mothers’ Support – [www.pumpingmoms.org](http://www.pumpingmoms.org)
- Working and Pumping – [www.workandpump.com](http://www.workandpump.com)
- March of Dimes – [www.marchofdimes.com](http://www.marchofdimes.com)
- Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Coalition – [www.hmhb.org/breastfeeding.html](http://www.hmhb.org/breastfeeding.html)

# GETTING STARTED WITH BREASTFEEDING

## During Pregnancy

- Pregnancy is the best time to prepare for breastfeeding and returning to work.
- Attend prenatal classes available at your hospital, workplace, WIC clinic, or private physician clinic.
- Attend La Leche League meetings to learn more about how to combine breastfeeding and employment.
- Talk with your supervisor to discuss your plans to breastfeed. Find out if your company provides a lactation support program for employees and, if not, ask about private areas where you can comfortably and safely express milk.
- Ask the lactation program director, your supervisor, wellness program director, employee human resources office, or other coworkers if they know of other women at your company who have breastfed after returning to work. Find out their tips for making it work including finding an affordable electric breast pump.

## During the First Weeks of Your Baby's Life

- Get a good start in the hospital by putting your baby to the breast within the first hour after birth, and at least 8-12 times every 24 hours. This will help you establish a good milk supply for when you return to work. Your first milk (colostrum) is packed with antibodies that help protect your baby from illness.
- Your milk is perfect for your baby's needs, even though it may seem you are not making much the first few days. Your baby's stomach is very small at first (only the size of a large marble!) and only holds 1-2 teaspoons, so the baby doesn't need much! Between days 2-5 your body will begin making larger volumes of milk.
- Ask the hospital for names of people you can call if you have questions about breastfeeding.
- The first few weeks after childbirth are a learning time for you and your baby. Use these important weeks to rest and take care of yourself and your baby.
- Watch for signs that your baby is getting plenty of milk. By day 5, baby should have around four to six wet diapers and three to four yellow, seedy stools every 24 hours.
- Avoid using bottles or pacifiers for the first 3-4 weeks as this may decrease milk supply. A lactation consultant can help you know you are making plenty of milk, and provide information on other ways to comfort your baby.
- If you and your baby need to be apart, you can express your milk manually or with a breast pump to keep up your milk supply, and refrigerate or freeze your milk to give to your baby later.

## During your Maternity Leave

- Take as many weeks off as you can. Ideally, at least 6 weeks helps you recover from childbirth and establish strong breastfeeding techniques. Twelve weeks is even better.
- Focus on your baby during this time and make time to rest 20-30 minutes every few hours. Housework can wait or be taken on by other family and friends.
- Practice expressing your milk by hand or with a quality breast pump, and freeze 1-2 ounces at a time to save for your baby after you return to work. This also helps you build a greater milk supply. Pick times of the day when you seem to have the most milk. For many women, this is early in the morning. Some women express milk during or after their baby nurses since the milk has already "let down" and flows easily.
- Be patient with yourself. It takes time for both you and your baby to adjust to your new lives together. Follow your baby's cues for when and how long to breastfeed, and enjoy this special time together!
- Help your baby adjust to taking breast milk from a bottle (or cup for infants 3-4 months old) shortly before you return to work. Because babies are used to nursing with mom, they usually drink from a bottle or cup when offered by somebody else!
- Talk with your family and your childcare provider about your progress, questions, and intent to continue breastfeeding, and let them know you are counting on their support and help.

## BACK AT WORK

*“I really appreciate that the Pentagon has a room available for nursing mothers. I have chosen to serve my country, and am glad I have not been penalized for supporting my family in the best way possible. I am so happy that I can give my daughter a healthy start in life that enables us to continue to bond, even though I work all week.”*

Breastfeeding Employee  
U.S. Department of Defense/The Pentagon  
Washington, D.C.

### Return to Work Gradually

This gives you more time to adjust and helps your body make a good supply of milk. Talk with your supervisor about options that have worked for different women:

- Start back to work part-time for a brief period before working full-time.
- Work from home or combine working at home and at work.
- Go back to work on a Thursday or Friday or just before 1-2 days off, depending on your work week. This gives you and your baby a shorter period to adjust to being away from each other before you go back full-time.
- Take Wednesdays off for a few weeks for a mid-week break, and breastfeed on your baby’s schedule to rebuild your milk supply.
- Work a split shift, with a long break in the middle of the day to go home and be with your baby. This can work well for restaurant workers.
- Consider using childcare close to work so you can visit and breastfeed your baby, if feasible, based on your work schedule.
- When you arrive to pick up your baby from childcare, take time to breastfeed first. This will give you both time to reconnect before traveling home and returning to other family responsibilities.



### Get a Quality Breast Pump

A good quality electric breast pump may be your best strategy for efficiently removing milk during the workday. Contact your local hospital, WIC, or Public Health Department to find where to buy or rent a good pump. Electric pumps that allow you to express milk from both breasts at the same time reduce pumping time!

### Identify a Private Place to Express Milk

Work with your supervisor to determine a private place to express your milk. Many companies provide a lactation program with a dedicated private lactation room for expressing milk.

- If, during pregnancy, you find out that your company does not provide a private lactation room, identify a temporary private area you can use. Ideas: an employee office with a door for privacy, conference room, or a little-used closet or storage area. The basic essentials are that the room is private and can be secure from intruders when in use, and an electrical outlet if you are using an electric breast pump.
- Explain to your supervisor that it is best not to express milk in a restroom. Restrooms are unsanitary and there are usually no electrical outlets. It can also be difficult to manage a pump in a toilet stall.

## When to Express Milk

Express milk for 10-15 minutes approximately 2-3 times during a typical 8-hour work period. Remember that in the first months of life babies need to breastfeed 8-12 times in 24 hours. So you need to express and store milk during those usual feeding times when you are away from your baby. This will maintain a sufficient amount of milk for your childcare provider to feed your baby while you are at work. The number of times you need to express milk at work should be equal to the number of feedings your baby will need while you are away. As the baby gets older, the number of feeding times may decrease. When babies are around 6 months old and begin solid foods, they often need to feed less often. Many women take their regular breaks and lunch period to pump. Others talk with their supervisor about coming in early and/or staying late to make up the time needed to express milk. It usually takes 15 minutes to express milk, plus time to get to and from the lactation room.

## Sample Pumping Schedule at Work

### *Traditional 8-hour work period*

|            |                                           |
|------------|-------------------------------------------|
| 8:00 a.m.  | Begin work                                |
| 9:45-10:00 | Use break to express milk                 |
| 12:00 noon | Take allowed lunch period to express milk |
| 2:30-2:45  | Use break to express milk                 |
| 5:00 p.m.  | Leave work                                |



## Secrets to Getting the Milk to Flow

Pumping is easiest when the milk “lets down” through the milk ducts. Massage your breasts, and gently rub your nipples. Relax! As you breathe out, visualize the milk flowing down. Think about your baby! Bring a photo of your baby, or a favorite blanket or article of clothing that smells like your baby. Some mothers bring a tape recording of their baby’s voice to help the milk start flowing.

## Storing your Milk

Because your milk is full of antibodies that fight germs and bacteria, it can be safely stored and given to the baby later. Breast milk is food, so it is safe to keep in an employee refrigerator or a cooler with ice packs. Discuss with your supervisor the best place for you to store your milk. If you work in a medical department, do not store milk in the same refrigerators where medical specimens are kept. Be sure to label the milk container with your name and the date you expressed the milk.

|                               |                                                                          |                                                        |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Refrigerated 32-39°F or below | Frozen (freezer with a door separate from the refrigerator) 0°F or below | Thawed (from frozen) and refrigerated 32-39°F or below |
| <b>Use within 2 days</b>      | <b>Use within 3 months</b>                                               | <b>Use within 24 hours</b>                             |

Figure 1 Opinions differ as to the amount of time breast milk can be safely stored. The storage times listed here are consistent with the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

## Getting Support for Breastfeeding

*I am very grateful to my employer for caring enough for their associates to make continuing to breastfeed after I return to work much easier!*

Breastfeeding Employee  
Home Depot, Atlanta, GA

### Approaching your Supervisor

Most employers are happy to provide the support you need, as long as they know what your needs are and how important it is for you to have their support. If your company does not have a breastfeeding support program, it could be that nobody has asked for one!

- Breastfeeding is the healthiest choice for your baby, resulting in fewer illnesses, infections, and certain types of skin irritations (dermatitis). It also helps you recover from pregnancy, and may reduce your risk of breast cancer. Be sure to discuss these important reasons to breastfeed with your supervisor.
- Your supervisor may not know what you need to continue breastfeeding. Simply explain your basic needs for privacy and flexible breaks to express milk. Use the sample letter on page 6 of this booklet.
- Show how meeting your breastfeeding needs will benefit the company.
  - Employees are less likely to miss work to take care of a sick baby because the baby is healthier. (This is true for moms and dads.)
  - Health care costs are lower since both baby and mother are healthier.
  - Employees who receive support for breastfeeding are happier and more productive.
- Explain that you are committed to keeping the milk expression area clean when you are through, storing your milk properly, and not taking longer than necessary for milk expression breaks.
- Be prepared! Consider possible concerns your supervisor might have. (*See Figure 2*)
- Be a team member. Be sensitive to the issues that are important to your company, and show how supporting your efforts to breastfeed can help both of you accomplish your goals.
- Be sure to show your appreciation for efforts made by your supervisor to support your breastfeeding.

| What you may hear                                                          | What you can do                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| “ We have no space for a pumping area.”                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Look around and find a space that you are willing to use</li> <li>■ Remind supervisor how small a space is needed (even a 4’ x 5’ space can work!)</li> </ul>                                                                     |
| “ The other employees might complain if you take time to do this.”         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Encourage coworkers to learn about the benefits of breastfeeding to your and your baby’s health</li> <li>■ Remind them that this is a temporary need for you and your baby, and that you will use your approved breaks</li> </ul> |
| “ If we do this for one person, we might have to do this for others, too.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Remind supervisor that supporting breastfeeding benefits the company</li> <li>■ Remind supervisor of other company approved breaks, such as smoking or exercise, if offered.</li> </ul>                                           |

Figure 2

## Dealing with Coworkers

- Seek to understand coworker concerns and work together to find solutions.
- Let coworkers know that breastfeeding is not only the healthiest choice for you and your baby, it also helps lower the company's health care costs.
- If other workers do not understand the breaks you are taking to express milk, remind them you are using allowed breaks and making up any additional time you miss.

## Find Other Breastfeeding Mothers

- Seek out other breastfeeding mothers at work and share experiences and tips through e-mail or even a monthly lunchtime mothers' support meeting. If there are no other breastfeeding women at work, ask your local hospital for information about local mothers' groups.



*You can use the sample letter below to tell your supervisor about your breastfeeding needs. Feel free to use your own words and relate it to your specific work situation.*

TO: [Supervisor's Name]  
FROM: [Your name]  
RE: Lactation Support in the Workplace

Thank you for your support during my [# of months or years] with [name of company]. This is an exciting time for my family and me as we prepare for the birth of our child. I am eager to work with you in making preparations that will allow me to return to work as soon as possible after the birth of my baby.

After speaking with my doctor and other health professionals, I have made the decision to breastfeed my baby. Just as I try to give my best to the company when I am at work, I also want to give the best I can to my baby. My doctor tells me that breastfeeding is important in preventing many illnesses and diseases for both my baby and me. Many businesses across America help their employees make this possible, and I hope we can find solutions together. Here are my immediate needs:

1. A private area with an electrical outlet to express milk during the workday. This space need not be large...even a 4' x 5' area is sufficient. Many companies provide a lactation room for their employees to use, and an electric breast pump to express milk.
2. Flexibility to use break times to express milk. I will need to express milk about two to three times during an 8-hour shift to relieve breast fullness and to maintain my milk supply. Pumping takes around 15 minutes (plus time to get to and from a place to pump). There may be occasions when I need to go over my allotted break time. If that happens, I would like to discuss options for making up the time.

Thank you. Knowing my company is making it possible for me to continue breastfeeding will help me feel much better about leaving my baby to come back to work. I look forward to discussing this with you.

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]



## **Employees' Guide to Breastfeeding and Working**

Published in 2008 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal and Child Health Bureau.

*"...HRSA, the lead U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Agency for improving access to health care for underserved and vulnerable individuals..."*

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This booklet is available at [www.mchb.hrsa.gov/pregnancyandbeyond](http://www.mchb.hrsa.gov/pregnancyandbeyond)  
Print copies can be obtained from the HRSA Information Center 1-888-Ask-HRSA