



# My Guide to Working and Breastfeeding

*Tips on How to Make Working  
and Breastfeeding Work for You*

Preparing to Go Back to Work

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**Breastfeeding Coalition**  
of Washington

A Program of WithinReach

# My Guide to Working and Breastfeeding

Like many mothers, you may be returning to work or school and wonder how breastfeeding will fit into your plans. With the right information and support, you *can* continue breastfeeding - even when you are away from your baby. This guide offers tips on how to make working and breastfeeding work for you.

## *Why keep breastfeeding when I go back to work?*

You and your baby will be healthier! Your breastmilk has antibodies and other ingredients that protect your baby from illness. These ingredients aren't found in formula. In fact, formula-fed babies are more likely to get ear infections, diarrhea and other illnesses. Formula-fed babies are more likely to be overweight or get diabetes. Six months of giving your baby only breastmilk provides her the best protection from illness and disease. Specific ingredients in breastmilk feed the baby's brain, give her a strong immune system and prepare her body for a lifetime of healthy digestion. This doesn't happen as well if you give your baby formula, food or water before six months of age. Your milk continues to be your baby's main source of nutrition for the first

year. Breast milk helps a baby's health for as long as he receives it. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months and then continuing to breastfeed after food is introduced until your child is at least one year old.

Breastfeeding helps you too! Breastfeeding lowers your risk of developing Type 2 diabetes and breast and ovarian cancer. Breastfeeding also burns calories. It helps you return to your pre-pregnancy weight faster. Your milk will help protect your baby from illnesses he is exposed to in childcare or from other family members, so you won't have to call in sick to work as often as mothers who formula feed their babies.

*Be patient, flexible, and proud of your commitment and efforts. Take one day at a time and don't be afraid to ask for support. Keep in mind: working and breastfeeding gets easier the more you do it.*



# Preparing to Go Back to Work

## Get off to a good start!

- **The first few weeks of breastfeeding are an important time to establish a good milk supply.**

You can get breastfeeding off to a good start by breastfeeding within the first hour after birth, not giving formula or other liquids to your baby, and nursing often. When milk is removed from your breasts, your brain signals your body to make more, so the more you nurse your baby the more milk you make.

- **Babies' stomachs are tiny!** Their stomachs can't hold a lot at one time so babies need to be fed often. Breastfeed your baby when she cues you by sucking on hands or smacking her lips. Babies eat day and night, on average 10-12 times a day.
- **Take as many weeks of maternity leave as you can to recover and focus on your baby.** Those early weeks are important for bonding with your baby and building your milk supply.
- **Some medications can affect your ability to make milk.** Check with your healthcare provider before taking any medication.

- **Giving baby formula can decrease your milk supply.** Check with WIC, a lactation consultant or your baby's doctor before doing so.
- **Let your supervisor know you plan to breastfeed when you are still pregnant.** This will give them time to help meet your needs when back at work.

## *What kind of pump should I get?*

Although you don't need a pump to express milk, using an electric pump is one of the quickest and easiest ways to express your milk. It can also help you maintain a healthy milk supply. Some mothers use manual pumps or hand-express their milk. It is important to learn how to hand express your milk in the case you are ever without a pump. Ask your healthcare provider, WIC staff, La Leche League Leader or a friend who also breastfeeds to show you how.

Double electric pumps can be costly. Check if your health insurance will cover it. You may also choose to rent an electric pump month-to-month. If you are a WIC client, contact your local WIC office.

## Introducing a bottle to your breastfed baby

Before you return to work, your baby needs to learn how to drink your milk from a bottle.

- **Introduce a bottle to your baby about 2 weeks before you return to work**, or after breastfeeding has been well established, usually after your baby is 3-5 weeks old. Ask a friend or relative to feed your baby a bottle of breastmilk. Introducing a bottle may be easier for some babies, but requires more time for others. It may take some practice and patience, but feeding your baby mother's milk is worth it!
- **Expressing milk between or after feedings allows you to collect milk to offer in a bottle.** You can add milk collected throughout the day into the same bottle and store it in the refrigerator to give to your baby later.
- **Try different nipples to see which one your baby prefers.** The nipple should be the slowest flow possible. Babies are supposed to take their time drinking their milk from a bottle, just like they do when they breastfeed.
- **Many mothers find it is best to start storing expressed milk at least 2 weeks before returning to work or school.**

- **Store milk in small amounts**, 2 to 4 ounces. Label bottles or breastmilk bags with the date collected and baby's name for use at childcare.
- **If you can, return to work gradually:** in the middle of the week, or work part-time if you are able to. That will help you and your baby adjust to the new schedule.

## Choosing Childcare

Try to find childcare close to your work. You may be able to go there to feed your baby during breaks or your lunch hour.

- **Let your childcare provider know your baby is breastfed.**
- **Give your caregiver small bottles of breastmilk to feed your baby.** Ask her to offer your baby about 2-4 ounces at a time to minimize waste and to use the milk with the oldest date first.
- **Breastfed babies feed more frequently and in smaller amounts than formula-fed babies.** Your baby shouldn't be put on a schedule. Let your childcare provider know to feed your baby when she shows hunger cues such as bringing her hands to her mouth, smacking or licking lips, opening and

closing mouth or rooting around on the chest of the person carrying her.

- **Ask your caregiver to avoid feeding baby close to the time when you pick up your child**, so he will be ready to breastfeed when you arrive.



# Back to Work

Talk with your supervisor before returning to work to let them know you will be taking breaks to pump. **Your employer may not know about the federal law that supports most breastfeeding employees** (see next page). Most employers will be happy to help once they understand how simple it is to meet your needs and be in compliance with the law.

Remind your employer and co-workers that your choice to breastfeed benefits them as well:

- **Formula-fed babies are sick more often than breastfed babies**, and their parents miss more work to care for them.
- **It's easier to provide scheduled breaks for you to express milk than it is to cover missed shifts** due to illness.
- **This is a temporary need.**

# What are my rights as a breastfeeding mom?

There are two laws that protect your rights as a breastfeeding mother.

## Breastfeeding at work

**National law entitles most mothers to take a reasonable break time to pump breastmilk as many times as needed up until their child's first birthday.**

Employees who work for employers covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act and can be eligible for over-time pay (section 7) are entitled to breaks to express milk.

Pumping and storing breastmilk will likely take about 10-25 minutes each time. You can use your paid break time, lunch time, or you can come in earlier or leave work later to make up for the longer breaks you are taking. This law also requires employers to provide you with a private, non-bathroom space to pump milk. (FLSA 29 U.S.C 207(r)(1))

If you have discussed your needs with your employer but they aren't making accommodations for you, you can file a complaint with the Department of Labor. To learn more about how to file a complaint, call

1-866-487-9243 or go to [www.breastfeedingwa.org/working](http://www.breastfeedingwa.org/working). You can't be fired for making a complaint or asking for accommodations to pump your milk.

## Breastfeeding in public

**Washington law protects a mother's right to breast-feed in public places.** This includes parks, buses, government buildings, restaurants and stores, libraries, etc. It's unlawful for someone to request that you stop: breastfeeding, cover your child, move to a different room or area, or leave.

If you are discriminated against for breastfeeding in public, you can file a complaint with the Human Rights Commission. Call 1-800-233-3247 or visit [www.hum.wa.gov/complaintProcess](http://www.hum.wa.gov/complaintProcess). (RCW 49.60.030 and 49.60.215)

Visit the Breastfeeding Coalition of WA's website for more information on your rights as a breastfeeding mother: [www.breastfeedingwa.org/working](http://www.breastfeedingwa.org/working).

# Pumping at Work

In order to keep your milk production up and to keep providing your milk for your baby, you will need to remove milk from your breasts a few times during the day.

- **Nurse your baby before going to work and as soon as you pick him up from childcare.** Nurse whenever you are with your baby to maintain your milk supply.
- **Pump or hand express every time you would otherwise be feeding your baby,** or about every 2-3 hours. Most moms who work an 8-hour day pump 2-4 times while they are at work. Pump or hand express before your breasts feel too full. Wash the breast pump parts with hot soapy water after use.
- **Store milk in clean bottles or milk storage bags.** Leave a little space at the top, as breastmilk will expand as it freezes. Store milk in the employee refrigerator or in an insulated bag with ice packs. Don't forget to put a date and your baby's name on your containers!

## Storing breastmilk is easy

These guidelines are for healthy full-term babies born near their due date. If your baby is sick or premature, ask your healthcare provider how to safely store your milk.

	Temperature Ranges	Freshly Pumped Breastmilk	Thawed Breastmilk
Counter top or table	60° - 85° F 16° - 29° C	5 hours	1-2 hours
Cooler with frozen ice packs	59° F 15° C	24 hours	Don't store
Refrigerator	39° F 4° C	5 days	24 hours
Freezer compartment within a small refrigerator	5° F -15° C	2 weeks	Never re-freeze thawed breastmilk
Freezer with separate door	24° F -4° C	5-6 months	

## Tips for warming breastmilk

- Put frozen breastmilk in the refrigerator for use the next day.
- Breastmilk can be given chilled or at room temperature.
- For use right away, thaw frozen breastmilk under warm running water or in a bowl of warm water. Your baby's caregiver can also do this to warm up your breastmilk for a feeding.
- **Don't warm or thaw breastmilk in the microwave!** It can heat unevenly and burn your baby's mouth. Plus, nutrients can be destroyed.
- Stored breastmilk separates in its container into two parts with cream rising to the top. Lighter colored milk on the bottom may look clear, bluish, yellowish or brownish depending on your diet or medications. This is normal. Before giving the milk to baby, gently swirl the bottle to mix the cream back in.
- If your milk smells rancid or sour it may need to be discarded.
- Sometimes milk that has been frozen can smell 'soapy'. This milk is okay to feed to your baby.

## Where should I pump?

Finding a suitable place to pump may require some creativity. Your employer may need your help in finding a place that is private for you, particularly if you work in a non-office setting.

Here are some ideas other mothers have shared:

- Use a conference room, fitting room, or empty office.
- Borrow someone else's office or a space at a neighboring business.
- Find a storage closet where you can pull up a chair and hang a sign up for privacy.
- Use a space in the common employee area at a mall.
- Work with your employer to put up a private space within a larger room, with pipe and drape or cubicle walls.
- If there is no alternative, you can buy a nursing cover for privacy and pump in your car. You may need a car adapter to do this if you are using an electric pump.

An extension cord can offer flexibility to pump in an area where there is no electrical outlet.



# Overcoming Challenges

It is normal to have some challenges with breastfeeding at first. With help and information, you can usually get past these. Working and breastfeeding does get easier—hang in there!

Visit [www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding](http://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding) and/or call your local health care provider or a lactation consultant for support. Also see the resources listed on the following pages.



*Being a breastfeeding working mother may be challenging and require creativity and dedication, but what about motherhood doesn't? Be proud of your efforts! Any amount of breastmilk you give your baby is better than none. Your commitment and hard work will benefit you and your baby for life.*

# Resources

## WIC Program

Call the **Family Health Hotline** at **1-800-322-2588** or visit [www.ParentHelp123.org](http://www.ParentHelp123.org) for breastfeeding support and to see if you are eligible for the WIC program.

WIC (the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children) provides eligible families with:

- Breastfeeding support
- Nutrition education
- Monthly checks to buy healthy foods
- Health screenings
- Referrals

Supporting breastfeeding is important to WIC staff. WIC breastfeeding services may include:

- Support groups
- Peer counselors. Breastfeeding peer counselors help mothers meet their breastfeeding goals by offering mother-to-mother support. Peer counselors provide information and guidance about breastfeeding during pregnancy and after the birth of the baby. Ask your WIC staff about having a peer counselor.
- Breastfeeding classes
- Breast pumps for WIC moms working or going to school

## Peer Support Group

**La Leche League of Washington**, [www.lllofwa.org](http://www.lllofwa.org) or call the 24-hour hotline at 1-877-452-5324.

### Washington State La Leche League Area Helplines

- **Seattle**  
(206) 522-1336
- **Spokane**  
(509) 534-3674
- **Snohomish County**  
(425) 303-0311
- **Vancouver**  
(360) 514-6773

## Other Support and Information

**Find a Lactation Consultant near you**  
[www.ilca.org](http://www.ilca.org), click on Find a Lactation Consultant

**Breastfeeding Coalition of Washington**  
More information about breastfeeding and working, your rights and more. [www.breastfeedingwa.org](http://www.breastfeedingwa.org)

**Employee's Guide to Breastfeeding and Working**  
This pamphlet from the Office on Women's Health has more helpful information about working and breastfeeding, including how to approach your supervisor and solutions to common workplace pumping challenges.  
[www.breastfeedingwa.org/files/employee%27s-guide-to-breastfeeding-and-working.pdf](http://www.breastfeedingwa.org/files/employee%27s-guide-to-breastfeeding-and-working.pdf)

# My Return to Work Plan

Use this information to find out how much breast milk you'll need to pump while you are at work. Babies between 1-6 months old take an average of 25 ounces of breast milk each day, ranging from 19-30 ounces. Most babies take less breast milk than formula because breast milk is better absorbed. Babies may take different amounts each day, depending on their age, weight and activity.

This table helps you figure out how much breast milk your baby will need at each feeding while you are at work.

Ounces needed per pumping session to make:

Number of feedings per day	19oz a day for babies about 7 lbs	25 oz a day for babies about 9-10 lbs	30 oz a day for babies about 11+ lbs
6	3.2	4.2	5
7	2.7	3.6	4.3
8	2.4	3.1	3.8
9	2.1	2.8	3.3
10	1.9	2.5	3
11	1.7	2.3	2.7
12	1.6	2.1	2.5

- First, estimate the number of times baby nurses per day (24 hours) from the **Number of feedings per day** column.
- Then look to the right to see about how many ounces of milk you will need for each feeding, according to the total amount your baby takes on an average day. If you do not know, assuming 25oz is a good guess.
- *Example:* If your baby normally feeds 8 times a day and needs about 25oz total, she will need 3.1oz per feeding.
- Now, estimate the number of feedings your baby will miss while you are at work. Be sure to include work hours and travel time each way.

- While I am working, my baby will need \_\_\_\_\_ feedings multiplied by \_\_\_\_\_ oz (from the table above) for a total of \_\_\_\_\_ oz needed per work day.
- I plan to pump every morning for at least 2 weeks before I return to work to get used to using my pump. I will use breast massage and compression to get optimal milk expression. I or someone else can practice giving my baby a bottle of breast milk at this time.
- While working I will be able to pump in the \_\_\_\_\_ (location). My goal is to pump around the times my baby feeds each day. I plan to pump at \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ (time of day), \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ during my work day.
- I will label my milk and put it in a cooler or refrigerator. Each day I will take my milk home to be given to my baby the next day (or frozen if I have extra). When I'm with my baby I will breastfeed and enjoy our time together.

Credit: Adapted with permission from [www.KellyMom.com](http://www.KellyMom.com) and *Milk Time Lactation*. These are estimates; your baby may take more or less milk than shown here.



# Breastfeeding Coalition of Washington

A Program of WithinReach

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To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call toll free (866) 632-9992 (Voice).

Individuals who are hearing impaired or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339; or (800) 845-6136 (Spanish). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

**Washington State WIC Nutrition Program does not discriminate.**

For persons with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats. To submit a request, please call 1-800-322-2588 (711TTY relay).