

# Breastfeeding and work

**Information  
for employees  
and employers**



You don't need to stop breastfeeding just because you're returning to work. Many working women find ways to continue breastfeeding their baby. And employers have certain obligations towards breastfeeding women. This leaflet explains how you can breastfeed and work. The last section sets out how employers can make it easy for you to do so; show this leaflet to your employer.

## How can I continue breastfeeding while working?

You have several options. You can:

- arrange for childcare close to work, so that you can breastfeed during breaks or before and after work;
- express milk (taking milk from the breast by hand or using a pump) so that someone else can feed your baby while you are at work; or
- ask your employer for flexible working hours, arranged around breastfeeding.

If you want to breastfeed while working, you must tell your employer in writing in advance. They will then be able to make preparations.

## How can I express milk at work?

You can express milk by hand or by using a pump. Friends who have expressed milk before, midwives and health visitors can advise on what kind of pump might be best.

It is a good idea to buy a pump a few weeks before returning to work, and practise using it or expressing by hand. This will allow your breasts to get used to 'letting down' when expressing, and you can see how long it takes to express milk.

You can build up a store of expressed milk to have in reserve, which will take the pressure off you for your first few days back at work.

Make sure all equipment is sterilised before you start.

## How should I store breastmilk?

Milk should be stored in a fridge and carried home in a cool bag. Ask your employer to provide a fridge if you don't already have access to one.

It can be stored in the fridge for up to 24 hours between 2°C and 4°C.

Breastmilk can be frozen for up to six months.

### Useful tips

- Label and date expressed breastmilk before putting it in the fridge or freezer.
- Have a trial run with childcare before returning to work.
- Be prepared by keeping an extra top and some breastpads at work.

## Find out more about breastfeeding

General information about breastfeeding:  
[www.breastfeeding.nhs.uk](http://www.breastfeeding.nhs.uk)

Download or order 'Pregnancy and work – what you need to know as an employee' from [www.dti.gov.uk](http://www.dti.gov.uk)

Download or order 'A guide for new and expectant mothers who work' from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website, [www.hse.gov.uk/mothers](http://www.hse.gov.uk/mothers)

The website also has a good section about your rights as a breastfeeding employee.

## Information for employers

### Why should employers support breastfeeding?

As well as there being certain legal obligations to breastfeeding mothers, supporting breastfeeding has business benefits. These include:

- reduced absence due to child sickness (breastfed babies are generally healthier);
- increased staff morale and loyalty, and a subsequent higher rate of return to work;
- lower recruitment and training costs; and
- an extra incentive to offer potential employees.

## **How can employers help?**

Employers can have a policy to support breastfeeding that includes:

- a break allowance so that mothers can express milk;
- provision of a clean, warm and private room (not the toilet) for expressing;
- a fridge to store expressed milk; and
- flexible working hours for breastfeeding mothers.

Make sure your employees are aware of your policy before they start their maternity leave.

## **What does the law say?**

It is for the mother to decide how long she wishes to breastfeed, and returning to work does not mean that she has to stop. On returning to work she should provide her employer with written notification that she is breastfeeding. Her employer must then conduct a specific risk assessment.

The Workplace Regulations and Approved Code of Practice require employers to provide suitable facilities for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers to rest.

The HSE recommends that it is good practice for employers to provide a private, healthy and safe environment for breastfeeding mothers to express and store milk. It is not suitable to use toilets for this purpose.

You can find out more about this on the HSE website, [www.hse.gov.uk/mothers](http://www.hse.gov.uk/mothers), or by phoning their helpline on 0845 345 0055.

The HSE also publishes a useful guide, 'New and expectant mothers at work: A guide for employers' (HSG122), which can be purchased from [hsebooks.com](http://hsebooks.com) or 01787 881165 at £9.50.