

Breastfeeding and Returning to Work

Many breastfeeding parents have successfully returned to work and continued to breastfeed or express their milk. Here are some tips to help you prepare.

Before You Return to Work:

- It is important to become familiar with the provincial or territorial legislation that protects the rights of breastfeeding parents in the province or territory in which you work. The Canadian Human Rights Commission has a list of the provincial and territorial Human Rights Commissions. Link: <https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/en/complaints/other-human-rights-agencies>
- Discuss your plans to continue breastfeeding with your employer prior to your return to work. Let your employer know what you will need and how they can help. Are you wanting your child to be brought to the workplace to breastfeed? Are you wanting to express or pump your milk while at work?
Note: It is not always possible for employers to accommodate breastfeeding or expressing milk while at work. It often depends on where you work and the nature of your work.
- Meet with your child's caregiver before you return to work. Discuss your plans. Are you wanting your caregiver to bring your child to the workplace to breastfeed? If not, how do you want your child to be fed when you are at work? Make sure your caregiver knows how to prepare and feed any expressed breastmilk that you want your child to drink while you are at work. Your caregiver's support is important!
- If you want your child to be fed expressed breast milk when you are at work, start storing your milk at least 2 weeks before your return-to-work date. Store your milk in amounts that your child will likely drink at one time. Breastmilk can be [stored in the refrigerator for 4 days and in the freezer for 6-12 months](#). Label the container with the date that you collected the milk. Also mark the container with your name if your child will be cared for in a setting with other children.
- Familiarize your child with the method of feeding that will be used while you are at work. For example, if your child will be offered your milk in a cup, have practice sessions with your child drinking from a cup.



When you Return to Work:

- Many breastfeeding parents have found it helpful to return to work part way through the week. Doing this will help you ease the transition from not working to working.
- Working part-time and then gradually increasing to full-time is another option that might help ease the transition for yourself and your child.
- Organize for the upcoming work day. Don't leave tasks such as packing the diaper bag and preparing equipment that you will need at work (example: breast pump and ice packs) to the last minute.
- If you don't have assigned clothing to wear at work, plan your outfit to easily accommodate breastfeeding or expressing milk. Washable clothing that fastens in the front is usually best. Patterned fabric can help hide wet areas if you are concerned about milk leakage. Some breastfeeding parents like to keep a cardigan or jacket nearby.
- Breastfeed at least once before you leave for work and as soon as you can after work.
- If expressing milk at work, try to express as often as you would breastfeed if not at work.
- Many babies want to breastfeed more frequently once the breastfeeding parent returns home from work. Breastfeeding frequently on days off can also help maintain your milk supply.
- Allow time for rest. Fatigue is common when you first return to work.
- Try to eat healthy meals and snacks. Some parents make meals ahead and freeze them for the work week. Other parents budget for meals that someone else prepares.
- Talk to other parents who have combined breastfeeding and employment. They can offer suggestions and support.
- Let your employer and colleagues know that you appreciate their support. Offer feedback on how it is going.
- Remember, transitions take time for both you and your child. Continuing to breastfeed or provide breastmilk makes a difference and is a wonderful gift for you and your child



Do you want to learn more?

Talk to your primary health care provider, midwife, public health unit or lactation consultant to learn more about hand expression, pumping breastmilk, and the collection and storage of human milk.

Helpful Videos

Hand Expression [Stanford Medicine](#)

Global Health Media: [English](#) [French](#)

Pumping
Breastmilk [Stanford Medicine](#)

