

Combining breastfeeding and working

Advice for Employers and Employees

fridge at work you may wish to use this, or you may prefer to bring your own coolbag and icepacks to store the milk in until you go home.

- If your baby refuses to take expressed milk, don't panic! Try a cup or spoon rather than a bottle. It is also worth asking the carer who will be feeding your baby to try this rather than yourself – babies are often happier to settle for 'second best' when the 'real thing' is not on offer! If baby still refuses, consider whether they really need your milk when you are at work. If you are only away for a short time, then feeding before and after may be sufficient, especially if your baby is over 6 months and taking foods other than breast milk. If you are away for longer, you may want to mix your expressed milk into foods for your baby and ask your carer to offer water to drink.

- Even if you don't want to express your milk at work, you can still combine working and continuing to breastfeed. If your baby is under a year, they will probably need to have formula milk while you are at work and you may need to express for your own comfort in the early days of your return, but provided your milk supply is well established, it will adapt to provide for your baby when you are together and to reduce supply when you are apart.

- However you decide to combine working and breastfeeding, be assured that as long as your baby continues to have your breastmilk, yours and your baby's health will benefit. Being able to put your baby to the breast is a wonderful way to say hello after work, to re-establish your bond and to enjoy the special family time that you have together.

Many women use their return to work as a major factor in deciding whether or not to breast feed their baby. Employers have an opportunity to influence this decision and this can have an impact on their business and the welfare of their employees.

This leaflet has been designed to give some helpful pointers as to how and why supporting a breastfeeding employee can be straightforward and highly beneficial. Overleaf is a sample policy for use by employers

Benefits to the workplace

Supporting employees who want to combine work and breastfeeding makes good business sense.

- **Lower absenteeism:** babies who are breastfed are on average healthier and this can often mean employees having less time off work to care for a sick child.

- **Higher rates of return from leave:** if an employer offers a supportive, flexible environment, the mother may be more likely to return to work earlier. This retains valuable skills and avoids staff replacement costs.

- **Equal Opportunities:** support for breastfeeding is crucial to enable mothers to combine work and family and should be a key part of an equal opportunities strategy.

- **Recruitment Incentive:** organisation will be recognised as a family friendly employer, which is good for corporate and public relations, recruitment and retention of staff.

The Employer's Legal Obligations

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999) outline the requirement to protect employees from hazards in the workplace. It is therefore the responsibility of the workplace to carry out a risk assessment of the mother's work situation before her return to work.

Working conditions which compromise an employee's ability to continue breastfeeding may present a hazard to health.

The Health and Safety Executive guide for employers on new and expectant mothers at work says, "Although there is no legal requirement to do so, you will want to consider providing a safe and healthy environment for workers who are breastfeeding to express and store milk". There is however, a legal obligation to provide rest facilities for new and expectant mothers at work.

Any queries relating to this policy or the implementation of it can be directed to Further Information: www.hse.gov.uk

“The World Health Organisation states that the maximum health benefits to both mother and baby will be incurred if exclusive breastfeeding takes place for 6 months and if breastfeeding continues into the baby’s second year of life. Consequently Cornwall Health Community has developed this policy to support mothers to combine breastfeeding their baby and returning to work.”

Sample Breastfeeding Policy & Guidance notes

We will endeavour to meet the individual needs of each woman using the policy for guidance. Examples of how this may be achieved are outlined below:

- A warm, comfortable, private space. This does not have to have a permanent function as a breastfeeding/expressing area, different rooms may suit different individual needs, eg private use of an office as required or private use of a suitable storage area as required.
- Additional breaks which will allow a mother time to express breast milk (expressing milk can take between 20-30 minutes every 3-4 hours).
- Access to handwashing facilities, for use before and after expressing.
- Access to storage facilities, if the employee requires them, eg domestic fridge. Alternatively, employees may prefer to store expressed milk in their own coolbag with freezer packs to chill it. Expressed breast milk can be stored, covered, at room temperature for up to 6 hours and in a fridge at 0-5 degrees for up to 48 hours.
- Additional breaks to allow the mother to breastfeed her baby. This could be when the baby is being cared for nearby or if the baby is brought into the workplace.
- Flexibility of working hours, where possible, especially in the early weeks after maternity leave.

Responsibilities of Line Managers:

- It is the responsibility of each line manager to ensure that all pregnant employees are made aware of this policy.
- Prior to returning from maternity leave, all women wishing to combine breastfeeding with returning to work should be offered the opportunity to discuss their specific requirements relating to breastfeeding.
- Line managers will conduct an individual risk assessment for each breastfeeding employee.

This policy is effective from (DATE).

Breastfeeding and returning to work

Notes for employees

Returning to work has been recognised as being a major factor in infant feeding decisions of new mothers. In fact, it should not be a barrier and to help you when deciding on your return to work strategy, we have provided here some helpful tips for breastfeeding

- Whenever you plan to return to work, ensure that your breastfeeding is well established. If you are not sure, ask for help from your Midwifery or Health Visiting team, or from a local breast feeding support group. (details at www.realbabymilk.org)
- Be reassured that it is perfectly possible to combine breastfeeding/giving expressed breast milk and working.
- Plan ahead – inform your manager of your intentions prior to returning to work, practice expressing by hand or pump and feeding your baby breast milk from a cup or bottle or spoon.
- Practice leaving your baby with a carer and allowing the carer to feed baby your expressed milk.
- Check out the availability of space for expressing in the workplace before you return – a first aid or rest room is ideal, however, an empty office or clean store room is fine, as long as it is private, warm and can be made comfortable. If your work takes you out and about, consider using your car to express – this can be made private by use of sunscreens.
- Think about how often you will need to express at work – this will depend on the number of hours that you are separated from your baby. If you are away only for a short time, eg 4-5 hours then expressing once may be sufficient to provide milk for your baby to drink and to stimulate your supply. If you are at work for longer hours, then you will need to express two or three times during the working day. Be guided by the frequency with which your baby usually feeds from you (younger babies tend to feed more frequently but may take less at each feed, while older babies tend to feed less frequently, especially after 6 months when they begin to eat other foods as well as breast milk) and by your own feelings of fullness. Don’t wait to express until you feel very full as this may lead to engorgement or mastitis.
- Consider your options for storage of breast milk. Breast milk can be stored, in a sealed container, at room temperature for 6 hours, at 0-5 degrees (eg fridge, coolbag with ice packs) for 48 hours and in a deep freeze for 6 months. If you have access to a suitable