

An Employee's Guide to Combining Breastfeeding with work



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The health benefits of breastfeeding on babies and mothers are well established. The longer babies are breastfed, the more health benefits mothers and their babies will have. According to the World Health Organization's recommendation, babies should be breastfed exclusively in the first six months and continue to be breastfed until two years or above while solid food is being introduced to their diet. Making breastfeeding compatible with work is a real challenge for working mothers. Nevertheless, returning to work would not be a barrier to breastfeeding if you are well prepared before your maternity leave starts.



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Getting Support from the Management and Coworkers

When to Express Your Wish?

1. During pregnancy and before maternity leave starts

Discuss with the Management about the importance of breastfeeding and your intention to continue breastfeeding after returning to work. Communicate clearly the specific support you need that enables you to express breastmilk at work. This will facilitate the management to make a better work arrangement for you and better preparation for the workplace.

2. After returning to work

Show your appreciation to the management and coworkers for their support to your breastfeeding. Keep your promises about the work arrangement, lactation breaks, use of breast milk expression area and milk storage facility. Talk to your coworkers to understand their concerns and work together to find solutions.

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How to Communicate with the Management about Your Wish to Continue Breastfeeding after Returning to Work

1. **Express your gratitude to the management's support at work**
2. **Stress the importance of breastfeeding and your decision to breastfeed**

e.g. "After speaking with my doctor and other health professionals, I have made the decision to breastfeed as it can provide the best nutrition and protection to my baby. Moreover, my doctor tells me that breastfeeding is important in preventing many illnesses and diseases for both my baby and me."



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3. Express your specific needs

e.g. "For me to continue breastfeeding while at work, I have several basic needs:

- ✦ Flexible lactation breaks to express breastmilk.
Generally, I need about two lactation breaks, each lasts for thirty minutes, in a working day. If an extra lactation break is required, I will make use of my non-office hours (e.g. before starting work, lunch time, after office hours);
- ✦ A private space (e.g. an unoccupied conference room or a curtained cubicle) with a chair, a table and an electric outlet for operating a breastmilk pump; and
- ✦ A refrigerator for keeping the expressed breastmilk. (the refrigerator in the pantry will do.)"

4. Discuss possible options of work arrangement

e.g. "I would like to work with you in making preparations and find options that will enable me to continue breastfeeding with minimum work disturbance."

Practical Tips and Reminders

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1. Gain support from your family

Discuss your decision to breastfeed with your partner and family and seek their support and cooperation. Your family can feed the baby with your expressed breastmilk while you are away. Remind your family to pay an attention to the baby's signs of hunger and fullness and not to overfeed. If a baby is overfed in day time, the desire to direct breastfeeding will be reduced when a mother returns to home at night.

2. Learn how to express breastmilk by hands or using a milk pump

The production of breastmilk depends on the baby's demand. The more you breastfeed your baby, the more milk you will produce. If you cannot directly breastfeed your baby, a regular removal of breastmilk every three to four hours by expression is necessary to maintain milk production. Expressing the milk out also helps to relieve breast fullness when direct breastfeeding is not feasible. Therefore, you need to learn and be familiar with milk expression techniques by hands or using a milk pump (either a manual or electric one). You can refer to the resources listed in this booklet.

3. Equipment preparation: a manual or an electric milk pump, milk bottles or bags and a cooler with ice packs

You have to get the equipment for milk expression and storage ready before returning to work. All the equipment should be properly cleansed and kept clean before use.



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4. Practice breastmilk expression and build up your breastmilk store two weeks ahead of returning to work

Practice makes perfect. The more and earlier you practice, the sooner you will get familiar with the techniques of breastmilk expression and the fewer hiccups you will encounter. You can also set up a small breastmilk store for your baby by pumping one to two extra times a day and keeping it in the refrigerator about two to three weeks before you return to work.

5. Strike a balance between work and breastfeeding

Breastfeed your baby well before you leave home in the morning. At work, express breastmilk when needed. Store your expressed breastmilk properly. Breastfeed your baby directly as soon as you arrive home from work. Give unrestricted, direct breastfeeds during the weekends and days off.

6. What can I do if I need to express more frequently at work?

After returning to work, some mothers may need more frequent and longer breaks for expression because, for example, they may not yet be used to expressing milk in the new environment. In that case, you may use your non-working time, e.g. lunch hour, time before starting or after work, for milk expression. Nevertheless, if you need very frequent milk expression, you may have breastfeeding problems such as ineffective expression or overproduction of breastmilk. You should seek medical advice, or sustainability of breastfeeding maybe affected.



If you want to know more about breastfeeding, you may:

-Visit the website of the Family Health Service of the Department of Health (DH) at www.fhs.gov.hk

Resource booklet "Love · Starts from breastfeeding...":
<http://s.fhs.gov.hk/ymavo>

Breastfeeding audiovisual resources:
<http://s.fhs.gov.hk/ambt7>

Frequently Asked Questions on Breastfeeding:
<http://s.fhs.gov.hk/4kp2t>

-Seek advice from health professionals or Maternity and Child Health Centres

-Call DH's Breastfeeding Hotline: 3618 7450

Resources
on
Breastfeeding
of the
Department of Health



#SayYesToBreastfeeding
母乳育嬰齊和應

unicef
聯合國兒童基金會

Working mothers can also
sustain breastfeeding.

Hear more stories about
breastfeeding at work

www.SayYesToBreastfeeding.hk

Contact us to learn more

☎ 2833 6139 ✉ bf@unicef.org.hk

 家庭健康服務
Family Health Service

Website www.fhs.gov.hk

24-hour information hotline 2112 9900

Breastfeeding hotline 3618 7450