

Breastfeeding and work

Many women successfully combine breastfeeding and paid work. If you have support from your employer, colleagues and family and some flexibility in your working arrangements, breastfeeding and work can be successfully combined.

If you wish to continue breastfeeding, you are legally entitled to support from your employer. Victorian legislation requires that employers must 'reasonably accommodate' employees who wish to continue breastfeeding.

Common work-related obstacles

Some of the work-related obstacles to breastfeeding include:

- **Early return to work** – one study of 500 mothers found that those who intended to return to work within six weeks of giving birth were less likely to start breastfeeding in the first place.
- **Insufficient paid maternity leave entitlements** – only about one-quarter of Australian workplaces offer paid maternity leave, with eight weeks being the average period of paid leave. Women are entitled, by law, to 52 weeks unpaid maternity leave.
- **Inadequate facilities in the workplace** – for example, lack of privacy or no access to a fridge.
- **No lactation breaks** – a mother needs breaks to express milk or go to feed her baby.

Suggestions for women

If you would like to continue breastfeeding after you return to work:

- Speak with your employer, the Equal Employment Opportunities Officer, Human Resources Manager or your union – ideally, before you go on maternity leave – about the workplace's breastfeeding policies.
- Discuss your intention to continue breastfeeding with your employer, ideally before you go on maternity leave.
- To express breast milk at work, you will need a clean, private area (not a toilet), access to a fridge to store the milk, an area to store your manual or electric pump (if you use one) and regular opportunities for breaks.
- If you are unable to go to your baby for feeds during working hours, decide how often you will need to express milk. The number of times per day will depend on the age and needs of your baby. If unsure, speak with your doctor, maternal and child health nurse, lactation consultant or Australian Breastfeeding Association counsellor.
- Choose an appropriate method. Breast milk can be expressed by hand or with a manual or electric breast pump. An electric pump with a double pumping kit is the fastest, which could make it your preferred option for use at work.
- Consider buying or hiring an electric pump. Contact a lactation consultant or the Australian Breastfeeding Association for information and advice on choice of breast pump for your circumstances.
- Look for child care or a babysitter close to your work rather than your home. That way, it may be possible to visit the centre during breaks to breastfeed your baby or else have the babysitter bring your baby to your workplace. Discuss these options with your employer and carer.
- Be flexible and aim to negotiate a fair trade-off with your employer.

Expressed breast milk – safety suggestions

Breast milk must be stored correctly to keep it free from contamination. Safety suggestions include:

- Use clean hands and clean equipment.
- Express into clean containers. These may be glass or plastic containers or sealable plastic bags.
- Label each container with the time and date the breast milk was expressed.
- Refrigerate the breast milk within one hour of expressing.
- Freeze excess breast milk.
- Keep the milk adequately chilled for the commute home. For example, pack the milk in an esky with a freezer brick
- Don't use a microwave to thaw or reheat breastmilk. Thaw or warm it by placing the bottle or bag into a container of hot water until it feels warm on the side of your wrist.

Discrimination laws

It is illegal for an employer to discriminate against you because you are breastfeeding or expressing. Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission laws (2010) stipulate that an employer is obliged to make reasonable efforts to accommodate the needs of an employee who is a breastfeeding mother.

Try to negotiate a reasonable agreement first but, if your employer is making it difficult for you to continue breastfeeding, speak to your union representative or contact the Australian Breastfeeding Association for information, advice and referral.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Maternal and child health nurse
- Maternal and Child Health Line (24 hours) Tel. 132 229
- Australian Breastfeeding Association Helpline Tel. 1800 mum 2 mum (1800 686 2 686)
- Lactation Resource Centre Tel. (03) 9885 0855
- Australian Breastfeeding Association Tel. (03) 9885 0855
- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission Advice Line Tel. (03) 9281 7100

Things to remember

- Many women successfully combine breastfeeding and paid work.
- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission laws stipulate that an employer is obliged to make reasonable efforts to meet the needs of an employee who is a breastfeeding mother.
- Discuss your breastfeeding requirements with your employer, ideally before you go on maternity leave.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Department of Health - Maternity & Newborn Clinical Network (MNCN)

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2012 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.