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Breastfeeding and work

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Summary

- Many women successfully combine breastfeeding and paid work.
- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission laws say that an employer must 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.

Many women successfully combine breastfeeding and paid work. You need support from your employer, colleagues and family, and some flexibility in your working arrangements.

If you wish to continue breastfeeding after you return to paid work, you are legally entitled to support from your employer. Victorian law says that employers must 'reasonably accommodate' employees who wish to continue breastfeeding.

Work-related obstacles to breastfeeding

Some of the work-related obstacles to breastfeeding include:

- Early return to work – one study found that mothers 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 – 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 of 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.

Combining breastfeeding and work

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

- Ask your work supervisor, the equal employment opportunities officer, human resources manager or your union about your workplace's breastfeeding policies. Try to do this before you go on maternity leave.
- Discuss with your employer your intention to continue breastfeeding, ideally before you go on maternity leave.
- If you cannot 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.
- To express breastmilk 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.
- Choose an appropriate method. Breastmilk 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 the best choice for use at work.
- Consider buying or hiring an electric pump. Speak with a lactation consultant or the Australian Breastfeeding Association for information and advice on the best choice of breast pump for you.
- Look for child care or a babysitter close to your work (rather than close to your home). That way, you may be able to visit the childcare 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 the baby's carer.
- Be flexible and aim to negotiate a fair trade-off with your employer.

Expressed breastmilk – safety

Breastmilk must be stored correctly to keep it free from germs, which can make your baby ill. 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 breastmilk was expressed.
- Refrigerate the breastmilk within one hour of expressing.
- Freeze excess breastmilk.
- Keep the milk cold on 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 putting the bottle or bag in a container of hot water. Then test the milk on the side of your wrist – it should feel about the same temperature as your skin.

Discrimination laws and breastfeeding

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It is illegal for an employer to discriminate against you (treat you differently or unfairly) because you are breastfeeding or expressing. Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission laws (2010) say that an employer must 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 makes it difficult for you to continue breastfeeding, speak to your union representative or contact the Australian Breastfeeding Association for advice.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Maternal and child health nurse
- Maternal and Child Health Line (24 hours) Tel. 132 229
- Australian Breastfeeding Association Breastfeeding Helpline Tel. 1800 686 268
- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission Enquiry Line Tel. 1300 292 153 or (03) 9032 3583

Things to remember

- Many women successfully combine breastfeeding and paid work.
- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission laws say that an employer must 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.

References

- *Breastfeeding and work*, Australian Breastfeeding Association. [More information here.](#)
- *Can you return to work and still breastfeed?*, 2013, Australian Breastfeeding Association. [More information here.](#)
- *Breastfeeding friendly workplace: The importance of workplace support for breastfeeding*, Australian Breastfeeding Association [More information here.](#)
- *Australian dietary guidelines*, 2013, National Health and Medical Research Council. [More information here.](#)
- *Inquiry into breastfeeding*, 2007, Chapter 5: Breastfeeding challenges, Parliament of Australia House of Representatives. [More information here.](#)

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Babies and toddlers basics

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- [Childhood immunisation](#)
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[There is a range of subsidised and free health services, including services for mental health and dental health, available for children in Victoria...](#)
- [Early support for a child with disabilities](#)
[For children diagnosed with a disability, getting the support they need as early as possible will give them the best chance of minimising the long-term effects of the](#)

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[disability...](#)

- [Immunisation – deciding which vaccines you need](#)

[Everyone's immunisation needs are different and are influenced by your health, lifestyle, age and occupation...](#)

- [Maternal and child health services](#)

[Your local maternal and child health service will be a great source of support after your baby is born...](#)

- [No Jab No Play](#)

[No Jab No Play – from 1 January 2016, all parents/guardians seeking to enrol their child at an early childhood service in Victoria must provide evidence that the child is fully immunised for their age...](#)

- [Parenting services](#)

[Parenting is one of the most important tasks we undertake but it doesn't always come naturally...](#)

Newborn babies

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[Detailing on bathing from the Royal Women's Hospital...](#)

- [Baby bath - preparation and safety \(video\)](#)

[Detailing on baby bathing from Royal Women's Hospital...](#)

- [Baby bath - skin care \(video\)](#)

[Detail on baby skin care from Royal Women's Hospital...](#)

- [Jaundice in babies](#)

[If your baby is full-term and healthy, mild jaundice is nothing to worry about and will resolve by itself within a week or so...](#)

- [Newborn bloodspot screening](#)

[Every newborn baby in Australia is offered a newborn bloodspot screening test to identify those at risk of rare, but serious, medical conditions...](#)

- [Phenylketonuria \(PKU\)](#)

[PKU is an inherited disorder that prevents the normal breakdown of a protein found in some foods...](#)

- [Phototherapy at Home](#)

[Jaundice is very common in newborns, so it's nothing to be too worried about. Treatment is very easy and safe. It all happens using blue light from a special blanket that you wrap your baby in. The...](#)

- [Premature babies](#)

[Sometimes premature labour can be delayed to increase a baby's chance of survival...](#)

- [Sudden unexpected death in infants \(SUDI and SIDS\)](#)

[You can reduce your baby's risk of sudden unexpected death by providing a safe sleeping environment and avoiding tobacco smoke...](#)

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Feeding your baby

- [Asthma - pregnancy and breastfeeding](#)

[Pregnant women with asthma need to continue to take their asthma medication as it is important to the health of both mother and baby that the mother's asthma is well managed...](#)

- [Baby care - weaning](#)

[Be guided by your baby and let them set the pace when weaning and introducing solid foods...](#)

- [Bottle feeding - nutrition and safety](#)

[Breastmilk or commercial infant formula is necessary for all babies less than 12 months...](#)

- [Breastfeeding](#)

[Breastfeeding positioning and attachment come naturally to some babies and mothers, but many need time and practice to get it right...](#)

- [Breastfeeding and travel](#)
[Breastmilk protects your baby from illness and infection, so it is the safest drink for your baby while travelling...](#)
- [Breastfeeding and work](#)
[You can successfully combine breastfeeding with work if you have support from your employer, colleagues and family...](#)
- [Breastfeeding and your diet](#)
[Breastfeeding women need to eat regularly and include a wide variety of healthy foods in their diet...](#)
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[Your nipples may be sensitive in the first few days after birth, but nipple pain is not a normal part of breastfeeding...](#)
- [Breastfeeding - deciding when to stop](#)
[It is up to you and your baby to decide when breastfeeding should stop...](#)
- [Breastfeeding - the first days](#)
[Let your baby feed as much as they want in the first few days to help establish good breastfeeding patterns...](#)
- [Breastfeeding - when to start](#)
[Breastfeeding within the first hour after birth allows your baby to behave instinctively and breastfeed with little intervention...](#)
- [Food for babies - tucker talk tips](#)
[Before six months, breastmilk or formula is the only food and drink that your baby needs...](#)
- [Lactose intolerance](#)
[Symptoms of lactose intolerance include bloating, gas, abdominal pain and diarrhoea...](#)

Growth and development

- [Child development \(1\) - newborn to three months](#)
[Infants in the first eight weeks have no control over their movements and all their physical activity is involuntary or reflex...](#)
- [Child development \(2\) - three to six months](#)
[Young babies still have a notion that the whole of life is happening inside themselves, and they are 'making it all happen'...](#)
- [Child development \(3\) - six to nine months](#)
[Fun activities, such as shaking or banging objects, helps a baby understand they have an effect on the world...](#)
- [Child development \(4\) - nine to 12 months](#)
[At nine months your baby is moving around by crawling or pulling along with their arms. Safety is very important now. Your baby is also 'talking' with recognisable sounds and may even say simple words...](#)
- [Child development \(5\) - one to two years](#)
[Between the age of one and two, your toddler understands they are a completely separate person from you...](#)
- [Child development \(6\) - two to three years](#)
[Parents can be tricked into thinking our toddlers are more grown up than they really are...](#)
- [Children's feet and shoes](#)
[A child learning to walk receives important sensory information from the soles of their feet, and shoes can make walking more difficult...](#)
- [Growth charts for children](#)
[Babies and young children do not usually grow in a perfectly smooth way, but instead grow in 'bursts'...](#)
- [Teeth development in children](#)
[Teething symptoms are common in children and can be managed without medications...](#)
- [The Maternal and Child Health phone app](#)
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- [Toilet training](#)
[When toilet training your toddler, praise every little success and remain calm about accidents...](#)

Behaviour and learning

- [10 tips for managing sibling rivalry](#)
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- [Anxiety and fear in children](#)
[You can help your child overcome anxiety by taking their fears seriously and encouraging them to talk about their feelings...](#)
- [Children and shyness](#)
[If your child's shyness is especially debilitating, you may like to consider professional help from a counsellor or psychologist...](#)
- [Children and sibling rivalry](#)
[Sibling rivalry is a common problem, particularly among children who are the same sex and close together in age...](#)
- [Discipline and children](#)
[Disciplining your child means teaching them responsible behaviour and self-control...](#)
- [Dummies](#)
[Dummy sucking should stop before school age to avoid teeth or mouth problems...](#)
- [Left-handedness](#)
[If your child is naturally left-handed, don't try to force them to use their right hand...](#)
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[When a young child is having a tantrum, it is because the emotional \(limbic system\) part of the brain is dominating the child's behaviour...](#)
- [Thumb and finger sucking](#)
[Finger or thumb sucking should stop before school age to avoid mouth problems...](#)
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[Some toddlers do most of their eating on the run, refusing to sit down at the table at all...](#)

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[Children who skip breakfast may lack sufficient vitamins and minerals including iron, calcium, zinc and vitamin B2...](#)
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- [Eating tips for children \(3\) - older toddlers](#)
[Offer children the same foods as the family, with a variety of textures and flavours for balanced nutrition...](#)
- [Eating tips for young toddlers](#)

[Children have a natural ability to sense when they are hungry and when they are full...](#)

- [Soft drinks, juice and sweet drinks - children](#)

[Encourage children to drink and enjoy water. Sweet drinks such as juice, cordial and soft drinks may cause health problems for children if consumed in large amounts...](#)

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[Vaccinations are encouraged for all individuals living in the state of Victoria, Australia. The immunisation program in Victoria may be different than other countries, and individuals who have moved...](#)

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