

# Returning to Work and Breastfeeding: A Checklist for Employees



Region of Waterloo  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
EMERGENCY SERVICES

Many mothers choose to continue to breastfeed their child after they return to work. Your breasts will continue to make milk as long as you breastfeed or express milk. Health Canada recommends that children be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of their life and that breastfeeding continue for up to two years and longer with the introduction of solid foods. Employers have a role in supporting breastfeeding mothers by providing accommodations.

## **Benefits of continuing to breastfeed up to two years and beyond:**

- Protection against osteoporosis, breast and ovarian cancer
- Less missed time at work; breastfed babies are at lower risk for many common illnesses such as diarrhea, colds, and ear infections
- Breastfeeding your baby before and after work is a great way to bond

## **Before you return to work:**

- Talk to your employer about your plans to continue breastfeeding
- Create a plan. Consider the following factors:
  - **Are you going to breastfeed your child during your work day?**
    - Can you flex your schedule to go to your caregiver to feed baby?
    - Can your caregiver bring baby to you?
  - **Can you express your milk to be fed to your child when you are at work?**
    - Do you know how to hand express your milk?
    - Do you have a manual or electric pump?
  - **How many times during the day might you need to express your milk?**
  - **How will you store your milk? You may need to invest in one of the following options:**
    - Glass container with a lid
    - Hard plastic container with a lid
    - Milk freezer bags
  - **Do you have access to a refrigerator or cooler for expressed milk while at work?**

## Breast Milk Storage Guidelines

Expressed breast milk can be stored in the refrigerator or a cooler bag with ice packs. Breast milk that is stored in a cooler bag should be used within 24 hours.

Method of storing	Temperature range	Length of time that breast milk can be stored
Room temperature	<25°C or 77°F	6-8 hours
Refrigerator	<4°C or 40°F	5 days
Freezer of a 2 door refrigerator	-18°C or 0°F	3-6 months
Deep freezer chest or upright	-20°C or -4°F	6-12 months

### Checklist for breastfeeding and returning to work:

#### Two to four weeks before returning to work:

- Discuss your plans to continue breastfeeding after returning to work with your family
- Schedule an appointment with your employer at least four weeks prior to your return to discuss returning to work and your plan to breastfeed. Together, create a plan of how this can be accommodated
- Decide whether or not you will need a breast pump
- Consider pumping and storing your milk in advance (see storage guidelines)

#### One week before returning to work:

- Continue to pump and store your milk using a schedule similar to what you will be doing when you return to work
- Practice your new morning routine and make changes as needed
- Try to get plenty of sleep so that you are ready for your return to work
- Talk to other mothers who have combined breastfeeding and employment
- Breastfeed frequently in the evenings and on weekends in order to maintain a good supply

#### Tips for after returning to work:

- Keep an extra shirt and some breast pads at work
- Aim to pump as much as you need to maintain your milk supply (e.g. 1 to 3 times during an 8 hour shift)
- Breastfeed before you leave for work and when you return home
- When expressing milk, try listening to music, looking at a picture of your child or thinking about feeding your child. This may help with your milk letting down

(Adapted from Project Health, Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services)

### For more information:

Please contact Region of Waterloo Public Health at 519-575-4400 (TTY 519-575-4608) or visit [www.regionofwaterloo.ca/ph](http://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/ph).

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