

It can be daunting when considering returning to work whilst still breastfeeding, but it is definitely possible. There are several things to consider to determine what will work best for you and your baby.

We suggest that you talk to your employer about your breastfeeding needs before you return to work. It is against the law in Australia to discriminate against a woman on the basis that she is breastfeeding. Employers must make reasonable attempts to accommodate your needs under the Federal Sex Discrimination Act.

Depending on your personal situation, you may be lucky enough to have someone bring baby to you whilst you are at work to feed the baby. Alternatively, you may need to express and store your breastmilk, which can be given to your baby by a carer. If your baby is a bit older, you may decide to breastfeed baby when you are together and ask a carer to offer solids and water when you aren't. Some women will choose to use formula while they are away from their baby.

If you decide to express milk at work, you and your workplace need to ensure that the following are available:

- A private area to express with a comfortable chair
- A refrigerator or freezer for storage of breastmilk
- An accessible power point if required for your pump
- A sink to wash hands and pump parts
- Time to express throughout the day – it may initially be useful to have flexible hours and break times if possible
- A labelled cooler bag and ice brick for transportation

It is suggested that you express roughly around the time baby feeds, to prevent engorgement, maintain supply and also have expressed breast milk (EBM) available to provide your baby whilst you are at work.

Expressing does not always come easily and it can be disheartening if you only express small amounts. The volume expressed is not always indicative of your supply. It helps to be relaxed and looking at photos or videos of your baby to encourage a let down. Other women find gently massaging their breasts or applying warmth to the breast during expressing helpful (not always practical in a workplace!). "Hands on" pumping with breast compressions may help increase volumes whilst expressing. It is also important to replace pump parts regularly if you find volumes are reducing. If you are seeking a recommendation for a breast pump, please discuss this with one of our Doctors – we have tried quite a few personally!

You do not need to sterilise breast pump parts each time you express at work. Keeping the parts in a closed container in a refrigerator after the milk has been rinsed off is adequate. However, you do need to clean them thoroughly in warm soapy water once a day. Ensure you wash your hands prior to expressing.

You may find the baby initially refuses milk from a carer. It is understandable to feel stressed by this, but your baby may make up for this with feeds when you are not at work (including overnight) or by drinking more water and eating solids during the day. It is often easier for a carer to offer EBM than Mum. Drinking milk from another device like a sippy cup, straw cup or open cup may work better than a bottle. Rest assured, your baby will not starve! When it is truly hungry, it will learn something new and drink milk from a bottle or cup. Initially it may be useful to freeze EBM in smaller amounts to see if your baby will take it, rather than wasting that precious expressed milk!

In regards to storage of breast milk, the Australian Breastfeeding Association has good information regarding this (see <https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bf-info/breastfeeding-and-work/expressing-and-storing-breastmilk>)

## REFERENCES

*Raising Children Network: Mums Returning to Work*

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/work-child-care/going-back-to-work/breastfeeding-returning-to-work#breastfeeding-and-employers-nav-title>

*Australian Breastfeeding Association: Breastfeeding and Returning to Work*

<https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bf-info/breastfeeding-and-work>