

Breastfeeding and Work



A guide for parents and employers

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Introduction

Although the number of Irish women who breastfeed their babies is increasing, our breastfeeding rates are still low compared with other countries. Breastfeeding has major health and nutritional benefits for mothers and babies. The Department of Health and Children recommends that mothers exclusively breastfeed their babies for the first six months and after that combine breastfeeding with solid foods until two years old or older. This is to make the most of the benefits to mother and baby and is in line with World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF recommendations.

This booklet has information for mothers about continuing to breastfeed when they return to work. On page 5 we give employers information and suggestions about how to support mothers to combine breastfeeding and work. On page 7 we give practical information and suggestions for mothers about combining breastfeeding and work.

Why breastfeed?

There are benefits to breastfeeding (or feeding your baby expressed breastmilk) for even a short time. Research shows that the longer you breastfeed the greater the benefits for:

- you;
- your baby;
- your employer;
- the environment; and
- the national economy.

Despite this, almost two thirds of Irish women who begin breastfeeding have stopped by the time their baby is three months old. All parents want to do the best for their children. More and more mothers are choosing to breastfeed their babies and they should have support to continue for as long as they choose, even when they return to work. Employers and co-workers should make it as easy as possible for you to continue breastfeeding when you go back to work.

This is an important issue because:

- The number of women in paid work has increased in recent years. Women with young children are now a large part of the workforce.
- New mothers are more likely to go back to their job if their employer makes it easier to combine child rearing and paid work.
- You must either feed your baby or express your breastmilk during the day to keep up your milk supply. This means you will need time off during your working day.

Under Irish law, you are entitled to time off or a reduction in working hours in order to breastfeed your baby (see page 8).

Benefits for you

Your baby's health: With a healthy baby, you will have fewer trips to the doctor and less medical expenses. This means you will worry less about your children's health so you can focus on work.

Your health: You are at less risk of developing health problems such as cancers of the breast and ovaries and osteoporosis later in life. You will also get back to your pre-pregnant weight faster.

Free baby food: Breastmilk is freely available which saves you money and trips to the supermarket.

Bonding: Breastfeeding supports bonding between you and your baby. Continuing to breastfeed means that you don't have to interrupt this special relationship when you go back to work.

Less time off work: Breastfed children are healthier in the short, medium and long term, so you will have to take less time off work to care for them when they are sick.

Maintain your job skills: You are more likely to return to work and go back earlier if your employer supports breastfeeding. This means you keep your job skills up-to-date.

Benefits for babies

Perfect food: For a long time it was thought that formula milk was almost as good as breastmilk for babies. Research now shows that this is not so. Breastmilk is much easier to digest and there are ingredients in breastmilk that cannot be reproduced in formula. Your breastmilk is specially designed for your baby, so they can grow, develop and thrive to their full potential.

Good health: Your baby is less likely to get sick with gastro-enteritis, ear, chest and kidney infections. Breastfeeding also gives some protection from asthma, eczema, diabetes and obesity. Later in life, their risk from high blood pressure and heart disease is lower.

Because breastfeeding has health advantages that last long after you have stopped feeding, you are making an investment in your own and your baby's future health too.

Benefits for employers

Reduced absenteeism: Parents need to take less time off to care for sick children as breastfed babies will be healthier throughout their childhood.

Increased productivity: With less absenteeism, work is not disrupted.

Improved staff morale: You will enjoy better relations with your staff, resulting in a more motivated, committed and productive workforce.

Lower staff turnover: Breastfeeding mothers are more likely to return to work and more likely to do so earlier if you support them to continue breastfeeding. This saves you the cost of replacing and training staff.

Positive corporate image: Staff and customers are more loyal to companies that have a family-friendly approach. This can result in greater productivity, easier staff recruitment, better public goodwill and higher shareholder value.

Cost-benefits: Employers who support their employees to continue breastfeeding find that the savings in reduced absenteeism and recruitment costs far outweigh the cost of providing breaks and facilities for breastfeeding.

Benefits for society

Reduced health care costs: Breastfeeding protects mothers and babies against a wide range of illnesses. This reduces national healthcare costs so we could all pay less tax.

Environmentally friendly: Breastfeeding creates no waste. There is less damage to the environment caused by:

- Production and packaging of formula milks;
- Disposal of tin and plastic containers;
- Fuel used to heat water for making up formula; and
- Pollution and fuel used to transport formula to shops.

Economic value: Breastmilk is a resource with economic value. A recent Australian study estimated that if all the country's babies were breastfed, the economy would save more than \$1 billion Australian dollars in health and other costs every year.

A healthier workforce in the future: Breastfed babies grow up to be healthier adults and mothers have health advantages that last long after they stop breastfeeding. The long-term benefits to employers and the whole community are a healthier workforce, greater productivity and lower national health care costs into the future.

Because everyone benefits from breastfeeding, we should give breastfeeding mothers all the support they need.

What should I do to help my employees continue to breastfeed?

In order to combine work and breastfeeding, your employees need options, support and facilities.

Options

Offer your employees a choice of:

- Flexible hours;
- Part-time or job-sharing; or
- Working from home.

Support

Have a breastfeeding policy that meets the needs of your employees (taking account of workplace conditions). See the sample policy on page 16. Communicate it to all your employees to help create a family friendly workplace that supports breastfeeding.

When your employees apply for maternity leave, tell them what support is available for them when they return to work. Have a simple procedure for requesting breastfeeding facilities and breaks so mothers aren't embarrassed to ask (see sample application form on page 15).

Facilities

You should provide a clean, warm, well-ventilated, lockable room (not a toilet area). This may be used for other purposes, for example the first-aid room, as long as it gives mothers enough space, comfort and privacy to breastfeed or express their milk.

Breastfeeding breaks: Under Irish law, breastfeeding mothers are entitled to time off or a reduction in working hours. In an eight hour working day, a breastfeeding mother needs at least one hour off. This can be divided in a number of ways:

- one break of 60 minutes;
- two breaks of 30 minutes; or
- three breaks of 20 minutes.

She may choose to take the time off by coming in to work an hour later, or leaving an hour earlier. The time off should increase or decrease depending on how many hours she works.

How to make it easier to combine work and breastfeeding

From early in your pregnancy, you've probably been thinking about childcare. If you are planning to continue breastfeeding when you go back to work, you will have to consider this when choosing childcare. Regardless of how much you plan for it, going back to work and leaving your baby can be stressful. Try to make arrangements that suit you and the balance you want to have between your work and family life.

Expressing your milk: giving your baby expressed breastmilk is the next best thing to breastfeeding. Expressed breastmilk is easy to store and can be safely transported in a cool bag. Breastmilk keeps for five days in a fridge and in a freezer for three months. Even at room temperature it does not ‘go off’ as quickly as other milks or formula.

Return to work gradually: talk to your employer about working part-time, with flexible hours or a shorter working day for the first few months.

Wait until your baby is older: you are now entitled to 26 weeks of maternity leave plus 16 weeks unpaid leave. If your baby is more than 6 months, they will have started on solid food and may be able to go longer between feeds which will make it easier for you to combine breastfeeding and work.

Get advice and support: talk to someone who is already combining work and breastfeeding, ideally in your own workplace. You may find other mothers through your local breastfeeding support group who can discuss the practical issues with you. Talk to:

- Your public health nurse
- A breastfeeding counsellor from La Leche League or Cuidiú – Irish Childbirth Trust (see phone book for contact details)
- Your local support group (ask at your local health centre for groups in your area)

What are breastfeeding breaks?

Under Irish law, you are entitled to time off or a reduction in working hours in order to breastfeed your baby. You can use this time in a number of ways.

- If your baby is being cared for in an on-site crèche or close to your workplace, you can breastfeed during these breaks.
- Your child minder can bring your baby to the workplace breastfeeding room at your break times.
- You can express and store breastmilk during these breaks if your employer provides a suitable room for this. The expressed milk can be given to your baby by the child minder later.

- If there are no facilities for breastfeeding or expressing at work, you can reduce your working hours by one hour each day (per eight hour working day) without loss of pay. You can take this time in a number of ways, for example, start work an hour later, leave work an hour earlier or take a break in the middle of the day.

For more information visit www.justice.ie for full text of the Maternity Protection (protection of mothers who are breastfeeding) Regulations 2004

What should I tell my employer?

You should tell your employer as early as possible that you plan to continue breastfeeding when you come back to work. You should give at least four weeks notice before your maternity leave ends so they can make the necessary arrangements.

Your childcare options

Whether you choose a crèche or a childminder, finding one to suit you can take some time. Talk to your public health nurse or other mothers in your support group for advice about facilities in your area. Word of mouth is often the best way to find what you're looking for.

If you are lucky enough to have an on-site crèche at work, book your baby in as soon as possible. If your baby is being cared for close to where you work, you can go there to breastfeed during your breastfeeding breaks. If your childminder is willing, they could bring your baby into your workplace during the day so you can breastfeed. Otherwise, you can express your milk and give it to the childminder to give to your baby while you are at work.

Things to consider:

- Make sure that any type of childcare provider meets professional standards and is registered with the Health Service Executive (formerly the Health Board).
- Tell your childminder that you are breastfeeding and that you intend to continue when you go back to work.
- Try to find somewhere close to work or on your way to work.
- You may want to breastfeed when you drop the baby off in the morning and when you collect them in the evening.

- Make sure your childminder knows how to store and use expressed breastmilk (see page 13 and 14).

Before your maternity leave ends, leave your baby with the childminder for short periods to help them get to know each other. Do a few ‘test runs’ in the morning to see how long it takes to get yourself and your baby ready, to the childminder and into work. This will make your first day back a lot less stressful.

Breastfeeding and work – getting started

If you are planning to continue breastfeeding when you go back to work, you should start giving your baby an occasional feed of expressed breastmilk from about six weeks old. This will allow you to get the hang of expressing and help your baby get used to taking milk from someone other than you. Dad or another family member should give these feeds as your baby may refuse to take them from you rather than the breast. You can use a bottle or a cup for these feeds.

Remember – your baby will still get the health benefits of breastmilk.

Practice expressing your milk by hand and pump until you decide which one suits you best and you are confident about doing it.

Talk to your employer before your maternity leave ends about arrangements for breastfeeding breaks and facilities at work (see ‘expressing at work’).

You may choose not to express at work and just breastfeed while you are at home. Your milk supply may go down as it adapts to the change in demand. You can ask the childminder to give your baby formula or expressed milk while you are at work. If your baby is old enough to go a few hours between feeds, they may be happy enough on solid feeds during the day and breastfeeds in the morning and evening. You could use your breastfeeding breaks to go into work later or leave earlier so you are apart from your baby for a shorter time.

Expressing your milk

You should practise expressing your milk before going back to work. Try expressing from one breast while feeding your baby on the other. You may

not get much milk to start with but as you create extra demand, your supply will increase. The amount of milk you express can vary a lot. Don't worry if you think there isn't much. You can combine milk from a few expressions to make up a feed. You can store milk in the fridge or freezer to use later.

Learning to hand express

The easiest way to learn to hand express is to get someone to show you how. Your midwife may have shown you in the maternity hospital. You could also ask your public health nurse or a breastfeeding counsellor. Contact La Leche League or Cuidiú – Irish Childbirth Trust (see phone book for contact details) for more information. The leaflet 'Breastfeeding your baby' has clear instructions for expressing. You can get it from your public health nurse.

Learning to pump

There are two types of breast pump – hand pump and electric pump. You can buy them in baby shops, pharmacies and by mail order. You can rent some of the more expensive ones. Before you decide on a pump, ask your midwife, public health nurse or breastfeeding counsellor for advice. Maybe you can borrow one to try out from another mother or your local breastfeeding support group.

Pumps have a suction cup that fits over your nipple and areola (the dark bit around your nipple). Make sure your nipple is in the centre of the suction cup. If your nipple hurts, stop and re-position the cup until it's comfortable. Start pumping in a rhythm similar to the way your baby sucks at the breast. Electric pumps do this automatically. Keep the pump upright so the milk flows into the container. Follow the instructions that come with your pump.

Sterilising

Wash the pump and bottles/cups well after each use. You will also need to sterilise all the equipment. You can:

- Use sterilising tablets or liquid dissolved in water;
- Use a steam steriliser; or
- Boil the equipment for 10 minutes.

Expressing at work

You will need a warm, quiet, private room with a lock on the door. You should have a comfortable chair, somewhere to wash your hands and a clean area to store your pump. If you use an electric pump you will need a plug point. You should be able to relax in the room. If you feel stressed or uncomfortable your milk will not flow.

If there isn't a breastfeeding room in your workplace, talk to your employer about what other rooms you could use (for example, a first aid room). A toilet area is not suitable. You and your employer may need to be creative and flexible when negotiating arrangements.

If there are other mothers in your workplace who are breastfeeding, your employer may consider buying an electric pump that you could share. Some of these have two cups so you can express from both breasts at once. This cuts down on the time you need to express. Each mother would need her own set of attachments. If everyone washes and sterilises their own attachments, these pumps can be used safely by a number of mothers.

Handy checklist for expressing at work

- Wash your hands well before you express.
- Have everything you need to hand:
 - ❖ Sterile container for hand expressing;
 - ❖ Sterile bottles or bags and labels;
 - ❖ Tissues; and
 - ❖ Something to drink.
- Have a photo of your baby or an item of their clothing to help you focus on them.
- Listen to music or a recording of your baby's sounds to help you relax.
- Reduce distractions by pulling the blinds or wearing headphones to make the room as quiet and private as you can.
- Sit in a comfortable chair with your back supported.
- Breathe deeply, relax and think about your baby. Your milk may take a minute or two to start flowing.

- Express from the first breast until the milk slows or stops then switch to the other breast. Change breasts like this until your milk reduces to a few drops from both breasts.
- Allow yourself plenty of time. Expressing can take between 10 and 30 minutes.
- Put your name and the date on the container before storing the milk.
- Keep a spare top and some breast pads at work in case of leaks.

Storing breastmilk

If you do not have a fridge at work, store the milk in a cool bag with ice blocks that you have frozen overnight. Keep the bag in a cool place. You can insulate it with newspapers if you need to.

Use a separate container for each session. Once the milk has cooled in the fridge, you can mix batches to make up a feed. Store milk in single feeds to reduce waste – allow 100-200mls per feed depending on your baby's age.

The milk may change colour or separate (thick at the top, watery at the bottom) when stored. Just shake the bottle gently before giving it to your baby.

You can store breastmilk safely:

- At room temperature for up to six hours. If you are not planning to give it to your baby within this time, you should put it in a cool bag or fridge immediately. Don't freeze milk after leaving it standing at room temperature.
- In a fridge (4°C or less) for up to five days. Put it on a high shelf and to the back. If you are not going use it all within this time, freeze any extra as soon as possible.
- In the ice compartment of a fridge for up to two weeks.
- In a freezer with a separate door (less than 20°C) for up to three months. Put the milk at the back of the freezer.
- As much as you can, try to have fresh breastmilk for your baby rather than freezing and thawing it. It is useful to have some milk stored in the freezer in case of unexpected situations.

Warming the milk

You can safely warm expressed breastmilk:

- **From the fridge:** by placing the container in warm water. Once it is warmed, use it within an hour or throw it away. Shake the container gently and check the temperature before feeding.
- **From frozen:** by thawing the milk overnight in the fridge. Keep it in the fridge until you need it, then warm as above. Use within 24 hours. Do not refreeze it.

Don't use a microwave to heat or defrost breastmilk. It can destroy vitamins and cause 'hotspots' that could burn your baby's mouth.

What your childminder needs to know about giving expressed feeds

Make sure your childminder knows how to store and warm breastmilk correctly. Tell her whether you want your baby fed with a bottle or cup. She should also:

- Use the same hygiene and sterilising standards for handling and feeding all baby milks and feeding equipment.
- Check the name and date on your breastmilk before giving it to your baby, and use the oldest milk first to reduce waste.
- Throw away any milk left over after a feed.

SAMPLE FORM FOR REQUESTING BREASTFEEDING BREAKS

Name of Company/ Business/ Employer: _____

Name of Employee: _____

Expected date of birth of baby/Date of birth of baby: _____

I confirm that I will be/am breastfeeding my child and I intend availing of breastfeeding facilities and breaks available.

Due date of return to work: _____

My preferred way of taking these breaks are:

1 x 60 minute break

2 x 30 minute break

3 x 20 minute breaks

My preference would be to:

- 1. Arrange to have my baby brought to me for breastfeeding during these breaks.
- 2. Express breast milk during these breaks.
- 3. Go to my childcare provider to breastfeed during these breaks.

I declare that the information given above is true and complete. I confirm that when I cease to breastfeed my child I will notify you accordingly

Signature of Employee: _____

PPS No. _____ Date: _____

SAMPLE WORKPLACE BREASTFEEDING POLICY STATEMENT

COMPANY LOGO

We,, recognise the importance of breastfeeding and undertake to promote and support breastfeeding by providing the facilities and supports necessary to enable mothers in our workforce to combine breastfeeding with their work.

Facilities and supports include:

- The provision of breastfeeding breaks. The timing of these paid breaks can be negotiated between the employed breastfeeding mother and her line manager or supervisor.
- For the purposes of breastfeeding or breast milk expression access will be provided to a clean, private room with power points, lockable door, comfortable chairs, a table, hand washing facilities, a fridge (where possible), a secure breast pump storage area, as well as the use of a company provided electric breast pump (where possible).
- Access to breastfeeding resources. Employees who are pregnant or considering parenthood will be provided with the booklet 'Combining Breastfeeding and Work' along with information on maternity leave/parental leave entitlements and work life balance information.
- Flexible work options. Employed expectant and new mothers can negotiate flexible work options (such as flex-time, part-time, job-sharing and home-based work) with her employer, taking into account both the employee's and organisation's needs.

All employees will be made aware of this policy.

Some useful websites

www.lalecheleague.org La Leche League is a voluntary organisation providing information and support for breastfeeding mothers.

www.cuidiu-ict.ie Cuidiu – Irish Childbirth Trust is a voluntary organisation providing information and support for breastfeeding mothers.

www.breastfedbabies.org Information for parents and health professionals on breastfeeding.

www.justice.ie For full text of Maternity Protection (protection of mothers who are breastfeeding) regulations 2004 Statutory instrument no. 654 of 2004

www.ihph.ie/babyfriendlyinitiative Provides information on the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative in Irish hospitals, a WHO/UNICEF initiative to promote breastfeeding.

www.babyfriendly.org.uk Provides information on the Baby Friendly Hospitals Initiative in the UK, a WHO/UNICEF initiative to promote breastfeeding.

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