



Working and the Nursing Mom

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Congratulations! You've had a baby! Now take the next few weeks to relax and enjoy motherhood. And by relax, I mean get 2-3 hours of intermittent sleep a night while recuperating from a major medical event, while simultaneously stressing about lack of income, hospital bills and adjusting to your new normal. Oh, and if you have decided to breastfeed, don't forget to break out the pump and teach yourself all there is to know about workplace pumping and bottle feeding in preparation for your return to work (in just a few short weeks) as a nursing mom.

The thought of leaving your baby to go back to work may be a daunting one—or maybe you welcome the excuse to wash your hair and have some adult conversation—but either way baby needs to be fed. If breastmilk is part of their diet, you will need to learn how to regulate your supply and express enough on a daily basis to meet whatever goals you set for yourself and baby.

For nursing moms, maintaining their schedule maintains their supply.

Successful workplace pumping begins with the nursing schedule established with your baby. When pumping, experts recommend matching what your baby would do at the breast. This likely means pumping about every two hours and not going longer than three hours between sessions. More frequent feeding at home will encourage milk production and ensure that the supply is maintained when pumping.¹

Understanding how milk production works can help nursing moms establish good milk supply.

The Affordable Care Act requires most insurance plans to cover the cost of a breast pump as a preventative health service. This also includes coverage for breastfeeding support, counseling and equipment.² Since breastmilk is a perishable food, pumping employees also need to plan for proper storage and transportation. Pumped breastmilk can be stored in any shared refrigerator or in a cooler with frozen ice packs. The cooler should also be used to bring the breastmilk home from work as it shouldn't be kept at room temperature (77 degrees F) for longer than four hours.³

I found having a designated bag with my pump, accessories and a small cooler very helpful. Being able to keep everything in one place also meant less chance of forgetting the requisite pump parts – moms are resourceful and there is no shortage of stories out there surrounding makeshift pumping setups, but easier all around if

¹ [La Leche League International](#), "Pumping Milk"

² [Healthcare.gov](#), "Breastfeeding Benefits"

³ [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), "Proper Storage and Preparation of Breast Milk"

everything is kept in one place. Many pump manufacturers also sell breastmilk storage bags (great for freezing) as well as microwave steamer bags which are a super easy and convenient way to clean all parts on the go.

Nursing moms must be expert multitaskers.

All of this means pumping a few times a day while you are working. The “Break Time for Nursing Mothers Provision” of the Affordable Care Act requires employers to provide mothers with reasonable break time and a private space to express their breast milk for one year after each child’s birth. This space *cannot* be a bathroom and must be free from view and intrusions.⁴

One of the biggest challenges for me, and many working and nursing moms, was having to stop what I was doing every few hours to spend 30 minutes attached to a pump. It was certainly a labor of love, and I would do it all over again, but returning to the workforce meant I needed to catch-up on a lot of work. The day’s momentum was often stalled when it came time to return to the aptly named “mother’s room.” I made the best of it by reading emails and making calls during this time, but my hands were figuratively tied, to a degree.

I was lucky to have an understanding manager, team and company supporting me, but not all nursing moms have this support.

I found myself pouring over articles, joining online support groups and tapping into other nursing moms that had experience nursing their babies to learn as much as I could about milk production and pumping. There is a lot to learn, and even after two 15-month stints of nursing my own babies I only understand a fraction of all there is to know. There are a lot of good resources out there like [La Leche League USA](#) which is a non-profit organization offering mother-to-mother breastfeeding support. Many hospitals also offer breastfeeding classes and employ lactation consultants to assist new parents on this journey.

New mothers often face a stigma when returning to work, and the added time away from their desk, whether supported by federal law or not, can add to that stigma. Breastfeeding is hard. Being a working mom is hard. Set a plan for yourself and do your best to stick with it, but show yourself grace. After all, your body just created a tiny miracle and you are still healing yourself. In other words, ignoring the “breast is best” hype and doing what is right for you and baby, is always the best choice to make. Just know that if you do decide to return to work as a nursing mom, there are laws, resources and other moms available for support.

⁴ [U.S. Department of Labor](#), “Break Time for Nursing Mothers”