

Flexible Breaks and Work Options

A Gradual Transition Back to Work

Ideally, new mothers need at least 6-12 weeks of maternity leave to recover from childbirth and to establish a good milk supply. When a woman is not able to take this time, employer support can help her transition back to work so she can maintain her milk supply. This gradual easing back into the workplace allows time for her to adjust to her body's changing needs. Transition options include:

- Part-time employment or telecommuting for a few weeks before resuming full-time work;
- Working longer hours 4 days of the week and taking off in the middle of the work week to allow a day to rebuild milk supply by being with the baby;
- Returning to work on a Thursday or Friday to allow for the quick weekend to rebuild milk supply before facing an entire week of separation from the baby; or
- Job-sharing, which research shows can be highly effective for both employees and the employer.

Time to Express Milk

Many employers are surprised to discover that the amount of time a woman needs to express milk is usually handled easily during the regular allowable break times. Women typically require two to three pumping sessions of around 15 minutes each, not counting time to go to and from the

lactation room. As the baby begins eating solid foods around 6 months, pumping sessions often become less frequent. After 12-15 months, most women have ceased expressing milk altogether.

Sometimes it is more efficient for women to simply feed their infants directly. This can work well if the company provides onsite childcare, if the childcare provider is able to bring the baby to the mother during the work period, or if the company allows the employee to bring her infant to work for the first few months.

If extra time is needed for milk expression or direct infant feeding, flexibility to make up the time before or after the usual work schedule helps make this expenditure of time manageable. Organizations that offer a flexible structure report that their employees are so appreciative of the program that abuse of this system of support is rare.

Women should discuss with their supervisors whether the current break schedule is sufficient. (See Figure 5.)

Education Resources

Because breastfeeding is a learned behavior, basic breastfeeding information beginning in pregnancy helps both male and female employees make an informed choice about infant feeding, and builds support among family members and colleagues. A variety of educational options are provided by companies.

Milk Expression/Infant Feeding Options		
Basic Services	Even Better	State of the Art
<p>Milk Expression Breaks Employee takes usual lunch and break times to express milk; extra time needed is considered unpaid leave time</p>	<p>Extra time that may be needed is made up as part of a flexible schedule (coming in early, staying late, etc.)</p>	<p>Break time is considered paid time, whether the employee goes over the allotted break time or not</p>
<p>Direct Infant Feeding <i>Option A:</i> Childcare provider feeds the mother's expressed milk to infant while mother is at work <i>Option B:</i> Childcare provider brings baby to mother to feed at lunch and other designated break times</p>	<p>Company provides onsite childcare for quick and easy direct access to the baby during breaks</p>	<p>Company allows mother to bring the baby to work during the first few months</p>

Figure 5