Your Return to Work or School: Continuing to Breastfeed

You can continue to breastfeed when you return to work or school. Breast milk is the best possible food for your baby. Exclusive breast milk feedings for the first six months will provide your baby with the best possible start in life. Here are some general guidelines (more detailed information can be found in your handout “Breast Milk Removal and Storage”). Consult your Breastfeeding Resource Person at least two weeks before you return to work or school, to discuss a plan for your special needs.

**Here are some tips that will allow you to continue to breastfeed your baby:**

- See if your employer has a child care center at your place of work, or if a child care center is nearby. If your baby is close enough, you can feed your baby on breaks and at lunchtime.
- Arrange to pump on your breaks at work or school. Try to pump as frequently as your baby would normally eat. If there isn’t a special room, see if you can use the health room, private office or another room.
- If you can’t pump at work, pump extra milk while you are home with your baby (see “Breast Milk Removal and Storage”). Try to arrange your routine so that the last thing you do before leaving your baby is breastfeed or pump, and the first thing you do when you get back to your baby is breastfeed or pump.
- Pump extra milk in the weeks before you go back to work. Build up a supply in the freezer.
- If you see a drop in milk volume when you return to work, review your handout “Lactation: Making Milk for Your Baby.” For more information or advice, call your Breastfeeding Resource Person.
- Nursing your baby as much as possible on your days off will help to keep a good milk supply.
- Your baby may want to nurse more often during the hours you are at home and may eat less often while you’re away.

**If you are not able to continue to exclusively breastfeed**

- Although it is best to give only breast milk to your baby, even a few feedings at breast or breast milk in a bottle is better than none.
- It takes about three days for your body to learn to stop making milk at a certain time of the day.
- Your body will gradually learn to make less milk as you spend time at work or school and when baby starts sleeping at night.
- If you must stop nursing suddenly when you go back to work or school, please contact your Breastfeeding Resource Person. Gradual weaning is recommended.
Example of how to adjust your milk supply

- **Days 1 to 3**: Nurse your baby at the time you would be feeding before going to work or school, then substitute expressed breast milk or formula for the next feeding. Nurse the rest of the feedings that day.
- **Days 4 to 6**: Same as above, plus substitute expressed breast milk or formula for two feedings (e.g., the second and fourth).
- **Days 7 to 10**: Continue substituting expressed breast milk or formula for an additional feeding. By day 10, your goal is to substitute for all the feedings that will take place while you are at work or school. Imitate your work schedule on your days off.

Other helpful hints

- If your baby will be given bottles in your absence, introduce the bottle at about three to four weeks of age. It may be helpful if someone other than the mother gives the bottle. Use warmed expressed breast milk. Continue to give the bottle two or three times a week so baby will accept it when you are away. If you are having trouble with your baby taking a bottle, there are other methods of feeding. Contact your Breastfeeding Resource Person.
- Use bra pads to absorb milk that may leak.
- Practice your schedule and routine that you will use when you return to work or school for a week or more before returning. This will help you to see where you might need extra time to get you and your baby ready to leave the house.
- It is normal to feel unsure about going back to work and leaving your baby with a sitter. Talk to your partner and friends about these feelings. The guidelines in your handout “Choosing a Sitter or Caregiver for Your Breastfed Infant” may help you feel more confident.
- Try to plan meals ahead of time. When you cook, double the recipes and put some in the freezer so you’ll have meals ready to heat and eat.
- Ease gently into your work schedule. If you can, start back to work part time. You could also start near the end of a workweek.
- When you get home at the end of the day, sit down, put your feet up and snuggle your baby. You need time together to relax.
- If you are substituting breast milk with formula, please see “Formula Feeding Your Baby” for information on the safe mixing of formula.