



## 12 Tips for Nursing Mothers Preparing to Go Back to Work

You know the benefits of breastfeeding and are committed to nursing your baby to give him the healthiest start in life. However, if you also are going back to work, you will need to prepare for the world of pumping.

If you are a novice pumper, you are undertaking something new and unfamiliar – not to mention that you are adjusting to being away from your baby. It can take some time to learn to express breast milk while re-entering the workplace.

We have combined Heather Kelly's (IBCLC, BBIC Advisory Board) clinical expertise and knowledge with practical tips from Bravado Designs' CEO Kathryn From and Lindsay Lebresco, (Converseon, BBIC Advisory Board) to help ease your transition back into the workforce.

1. **Speak to your employer early on:** Talk to your boss, preferably while still pregnant, and let him/her know that you intend to pump when you return to work. You want to give your company as much opportunity as possible to come up with a suitable arrangement for you, and not spring it on them that you need a place to pump on your first day back. If there is no designated area for pumping mothers currently, help your employer by suggesting a space that you think would work and where you would be comfortable pumping. New healthcare legislation requires an employer with more than 50 employees to provide a private space for pumping (not just a restroom) and reasonable breaks for all new mothers, and many smaller companies will happily support your intention to breastfeed and follow suit.
2. **Be prepared:** Create a specific plan prior to returning to work and share your plan with your partner and caregiver. What are your expectations? How often will you need to express milk? Will there be an effect on your work day? Will you nurse your infant in the mornings and evenings? By thinking through your plan you will reduce your stress about returning to work while continuing to breastfeed. Of course, flexibility is part of any great plan – be prepared to be flexible as your baby's needs change and your work demands change as well.
3. **Connect with other working mothers:** Working mothers are very willing to share their experiences and are a terrific source of information and ideas. Speak with any mothers in your place of work about their pumping experiences. What worked well, and what would they do differently in hindsight? Other friends and relatives might have insights to share. There are also many forums and information sources online to help you prepare.
4. **Ease back into full-time:** It can be a big adjustment from caring for your newborn 24/7 to taking on the role of full-time working mother. During the first few days, you will be working out the kinks, learning how to relax while pumping, and generally getting your bearings. A slower re-entry, if your employer is agreeable, can be very beneficial for you, your family, and your place of work. Many employers are open to the initial week

being a shorter one, or working shorter days. Some new mothers begin their re-entry on a Wednesday rather than a Monday to make the first week more manageable.



5. **Practice pumping for a couple of weeks before going back to work:** As with anything, practice does make it easier. If you have been exclusively breastfeeding for a few months, switching to the regular use of a pump can take some time to get used to (for more information see, Pumping: How to do I Use a Breast Pump) . Don't be discouraged if you are not an expert pumper your first day; trust us when we say that with a little work you will get the hang of it. Heading back to work with some pumping experience will increase your confidence.
6. **Build up a 2-3 day supply of milk:** Knowing that you have milk on hand for the first few days will boost your confidence and allow you time to adjust to the reality of pumping at work, as things might not go exactly as you had planned. A buffer supply will help you through the first few days as you establish your pumping routine, and you won't need to feel rushed or have the feeling that your milk supply at home is getting low.
7. **Practice setting up and cleaning your pump:** Although maintaining clean pump parts is not very time consuming, it can be an adjustment at first. With practice you will quickly become a pro and minimize this time, but you will be much more relaxed at work if you are not trying to familiarize yourself with breast pump parts on your first day back.
8. **Introduce a bottle to your newborn before going back to work:** Some babies take to a bottle with ease, others not so much. Even if it's just one bottle for a few days leading up to your return to work, knowing that your baby will take a bottle of milk will reduce your stress level and make it easier to return to work. Giving your baby a bottle daily can also help familiarize yourself to the pump, as it is necessary to pump in place of a bottle feeding every time in order to keep up your milk supply.
9. **Plan ahead:** Many jobs require you to travel for work. With a little practice and confidence, pumping, like nursing, can be done anywhere. If you know you are going to need to travel for work at times, first be sure you have the supplies that will make this easier. Most pumps can be used with batteries if you don't have an outlet available, and some pumps can be plugged in to a car adaptor. If you plan to stay somewhere overnight, call ahead and make sure your room will have a mini-fridge and if not, request one to be brought in. Carry a cover-up – sometimes total privacy isn't available while on the road, and a nursing shawl works just as well for pumping as it does for your baby.
10. **Remain positive about what you are able to give to your baby:** Returning to work and leaving your baby either at home with a caregiver or in a daycare can be trying to a new mom. Give yourself the time and space to adjust to this learning curve. Breastfeeding (and pumping) can—unfortunately—become the “dumping ground” for all the mixed



emotions women experience when they return to work. View your pumping times as a time where you can visualize your baby and “re-connect,” while providing him with sustenance. Bringing milk home in the afternoons or evenings should be a source of tremendous pride for you, and more evidence that you are willing to work to continue to keep this strong bond you have created with your little one.

11. **Give as much as you can, and be easy on yourself if you need to introduce a supplement:** Some women (not all) experience some lower pumping yields when they return to work. Remember that even if you need to introduce some other sort of supplement, that everything you can give is important. If the baby needs to receive a bottle of an alternative to your own milk, this does not mean that pumping and continuing to keep up this relationship is not worth it. The benefits of breast milk are dose-related: the more, the better. So even if you end up only producing 70% of his daily needs while you are at work, it is still very much worth it!
  
12. **Be your own advocate:** Breastfeeding your child is likely a decision you made while you were still pregnant. Be confident about this decision and determine what it will take to make this a reality. No employer, co-worker, child-care provider, etc, is going to ask *you* what they can do to make your transition back to work easier. It is up to you to decide and vocalize what you’ll need to make this very important period in your early family life, a success.