

## Breastfeeding at work: Your rights and resources



Breastfeeding while managing a busy work schedule can be challenging for mothers. It requires not only physical and emotional dedication but also **supportive workplace policies** that respect and accommodate the need to nurse or express milk during work hours.

**Understanding your rights** and having **access to practical resources** can significantly ease this process, making it possible for mothers to continue breastfeeding while contributing actively to their professional roles.

This article explores **practical tips for managing breastfeeding at work**, and how employers can create supportive environments for nursing mothers, ensuring privacy, time, and understanding in the workplace.

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## Understanding your rights

Breastfeeding mothers returning to work face **numerous challenges** but understanding their rights can empower them to seek proper accommodations without fear of discrimination or job loss.

In many regions, particularly within the European Union, **laws are in place** to support nursing mothers at work. These legal frameworks are designed to ensure that mothers can continue breastfeeding while managing their careers.

### Here's an overview of the key rights that nursing mothers are entitled to in the workplace:

#### **Flexible working arrangements:**



While not universally mandated, many regions encourage or require employers to consider flexible working arrangements for breastfeeding mothers. This can include options such as part-time work, flexible scheduling, or the possibility to work from home, depending on the job nature.

#### **Right to adequate breaks:**



Legislation in many places mandates that employers provide reasonable breaks for breastfeeding or milk expression. The specifics can vary, but the principle is that mothers should have enough time to pump breast milk roughly as often as they would need to feed their baby directly.

#### **Right to private space:**



Employers are required to provide a private and secure place for mothers to express milk. This space should not be a bathroom; it needs to be a hygienic environment equipped with a comfortable chair and a flat surface for placing a breast pump and other supplies. Ideally, this area would also have access to a power outlet and a place to store expressed milk.

#### **Protection from discrimination:**



Breastfeeding mothers should be free from any form of discrimination or unfair treatment arising from their need to breastfeed or express milk. This includes ensuring that taking breaks for breastfeeding does not negatively impact job evaluations or opportunities for advancement.

## Practical tips for breastfeeding at work

For nursing mothers returning to work, managing breastfeeding alongside professional responsibilities can be a daunting task. However, with the right strategies and planning, it is entirely feasible.



Here are some practical tips to help manage breastfeeding while maintaining a busy work schedule:

- **Develop a pumping schedule:** Establishing a **consistent routine for pumping** is crucial. Aim to express milk around the same times you would normally feed your baby. This regularity helps maintain your milk supply and can reduce physical discomfort.
  - **Communicate your needs:** Having an open dialogue with your employer is essential. Discuss **your breastfeeding plans** and the need for breaks and a private space for pumping. Clear communication can help ensure that your needs are met without misunderstanding.
  - **Use the right equipment:** Invest in a high-quality, **portable breast pump**. This makes it easier to express milk efficiently during work hours. Having extra pump parts and storage bags on hand at work can also help avoid disruptions.
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- **Comfortable and private space:** Ensure that the space provided by your employer is private, comfortable, and secure. This area should have a **comfortable chair, a table for the pump, and an electrical outlet**. If possible, it should also be close to a sink for washing hands and pump parts.
- **Storage for breast milk:** Safe storage is critical. If a refrigerator is not available, use an insulated cooler with ice packs to keep expressed milk cool until you can get it home. **Label all milk with the date it was expressed** to keep track of its freshness.
- **Dress practically:** Wear clothes that allow easy access for pumping. Nursing tops or dresses, or simply layered outfits, can offer convenience and maintain privacy.
- **Stay hydrated and nourished:** Drinking plenty of water and maintaining a healthy diet are important for milk production. Keep **water and nutritious snacks at your desk** to remind you to stay hydrated and fueled throughout the day.






## Creating a supportive work environment

Employers play a vital role in facilitating a **supportive environment** for breastfeeding mothers. A positive, accommodating workplace not only helps in meeting legal obligations but also **boosts employee satisfaction and retention**.

**Here are steps employers can take to create a nurturing environment for nursing mothers:**

- **Establish clear policies:** Employers should develop and clearly communicate policies that support breastfeeding. These policies can include flexible scheduling options, breaks for pumping milk, and access to a private space for breastfeeding or expressing milk.
- **Provide suitable facilities:** A dedicated lactation room is essential. This room should be private, lockable, and equipped with comfortable seating, a flat surface for a breast pump, and an electrical outlet. If possible, it should be near running water and a refrigerator for storing milk.
- **Foster an inclusive culture:** Training and seminars can educate all employees about the benefits of breastfeeding and the needs of breastfeeding mothers. Promoting an inclusive culture reduces stigma and supports diversity in the workplace.
- **Support from management:** Active support from management can set a positive tone throughout the organisation. Managers should be trained on the policies and encouraged to facilitate accommodation for breastfeeding employees.
- **Regular feedback and adjustment:** Employers should maintain open channels of communication with breastfeeding employees to receive feedback on existing practices and make necessary adjustments. This ensures that the support remains relevant and effective as needs and circumstances evolve.

A close-up photograph of a woman with long brown hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a light-colored top and is holding a baby who is wearing a red polka-dot shirt. The woman's hands are gently cradling the baby's head.

## Common issues breastfeeding mothers face at work

Breastfeeding while managing a career can present several challenges that may affect a mother's ability to maintain breastfeeding if she wishes.

Recognising and addressing these common issues is crucial for both employers and mothers to ensure that the transition back to work is as smooth as possible.

### Here are some of the most frequent challenges breastfeeding mothers face in the workplace:

- **Lack of proper facilities:** Despite legal requirements, some workplaces may not have adequate facilities for pumping milk. This can include the absence of a private, comfortable, and hygienic space, which is essential for mothers to express milk during the day.
  - **Inflexible work schedules:** Rigid work schedules can make it difficult to take breaks for pumping at regular intervals, which is necessary to maintain milk supply and comfort. Without the ability to take breaks when needed, mothers may experience physical discomfort or a decrease in milk supply.
  - **Insufficient support from management:** Support from supervisors and colleagues plays a critical role in a breastfeeding mother's experience at work. Lack of understanding or support can lead to stress and discomfort, which might discourage mothers from continuing to breastfeed.
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- **Stigma and privacy concerns:** Breastfeeding at work can sometimes lead to privacy issues or discomfort among other employees, leading to potential stigma. Mothers may feel embarrassed or reluctant to pump at work due to a lack of private spaces or negative attitudes from coworkers.
- **Logistical challenges of milk storage:** Finding a safe and sanitary place to store expressed milk is another common challenge. Without access to a refrigerator or a personal cooler, managing milk storage can be cumbersome and stressful.
- **Physical issues related to pumping:** Regularly expressing milk in less-than-ideal conditions can lead to physical problems such as clogged milk ducts, breast infections, or discomfort due to inadequate pumping facilities.
- **Balancing work and pumping schedules:** Coordinating pumping around meetings, work tasks, and breaks can be a logistical puzzle, particularly in fast-paced or less flexible work environments.



## Resources for support and advocacy

Finding the right **support and resources is crucial** for breastfeeding mothers, especially when balancing the demands of work and personal life. Here are some resources and avenues for support and advocacy that can help:

### HealthHero services:

HealthHero offers a comprehensive suite of services that include virtual consultations with healthcare professionals who specialise in maternal and child health. These services can provide guidance on breastfeeding, workplace accommodations, and overall health maintenance. Additionally, HealthHero's platform offers resources and tips on managing the challenges of breastfeeding while working.

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### Online communities and forums:

There are many online platforms where nursing mothers can share experiences, find advice, and receive support from peers facing similar challenges.

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### Local support groups:

Many communities have local breastfeeding support groups where mothers can meet others in similar situations. These groups often offer emotional support and practical advice, which can be invaluable.

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### Professional lactation consultants:

Engaging a professional lactation consultant can provide personalised advice and support. Many consultants offer services that include workplace visits to help set up a suitable environment for breastfeeding or expressing milk.

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### Legal advice and advocacy groups:

For mothers facing challenges with workplace accommodations, consulting legal experts or reaching out to advocacy groups can be helpful. These resources can offer guidance on rights and procedures to ensure that employers adhere to laws pertaining to breastfeeding in the workplace.

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Successfully managing breastfeeding while working demands not only personal commitment but also a **supportive network** and **understanding from the workplace**. It's about balancing professional responsibilities with the health needs of both mother and child, a challenge that can be significantly eased with the right resources and environment.

For mothers, knowing your rights and accessing support, from **organisational policies** to **digital health services** like HealthHero, can empower you to continue breastfeeding as long as you choose. For employers, creating a supportive environment is not just about fulfilling legal obligations but about fostering a **compassionate and inclusive workplace culture that values the well-being of its employees**.

HealthHero's commitment to accessible, comprehensive healthcare support is a valuable resource for nursing mothers. Their services can guide you through the challenges of breastfeeding while providing **professional medical advice and emotional support**.

Contact **HealthHero** today for more support and advice. We're with you every step of the way.

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