



Breastfeeding and Return to Work

On return to work after Parental Leave, the subject of breastfeeding and expressing milk can be a sensitive matter. It is not something that is commonly seen or talked about in the workplace and it can seem daunting to initiate conversations with employers about the practicalities of feeding on return to work. Empowering individuals to express or breastfeed, whether it be a necessity or a choice, can have a positive impact on both physical and mental wellbeing.

As an employee who wishes to express or breastfeed on return to work what do I need to consider?

A recent survey of 1200 NHS staff published in the BMJ August 2022 found that they had insufficient support to breastfeed when returning to work. Most of these were secondary care employees. A subsequent interview piece the following recommendations were made to support individuals with this process (1):

- Know your rights. Ask your practice manager about your local breastfeeding policy so you are both aware of this
- Inform your employer in writing that you will be expressing milk on your return to work, and request a breastfeeding risk assessment before your return
- Know what you're entitled to: a clean, lockable room; a fridge for milk storage; adequate time to express
- Empower yourself, come up with a workable plan to discuss with your practice manager

As an employer, how do I facilitate breastfeeding/ expressing for my employees on returning to work?

In primary care this is relatively straightforward to accommodate. Section 25(4) of the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 (SI 1992/3004) requires employers to provide suitable and sufficient facilities for workers who are pregnant or breastfeeding to rest. The HSE advises that a rest area should:

- Include somewhere to lie down.

- Be hygienic and private so the employee can express milk if they choose to (toilets are not a suitable place for this); and
- Include somewhere to store milk, for example a fridge.
- Employers should consider providing paid time off to express milk or breastfeed.
- Have a breastfeeding policy and provide a risk assessment for employees where you can discuss the above recommendations.

Further guidance can be found at <https://www.acas.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-03/acas-guide-on-accommodating-breastfeeding-in-the-workplace.pdf>.

1. Torjesen. How to Breastfeed at Work. BMJ2022;378:o1960<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.o1960>