

Breastfeeding and returning to work or school

Continued breastfeeding after returning to work or school is possible and can often be easily incorporated into a family's daily routine. Continued breastfeeding is important to the health of both mother and baby, and is a protected right covered under The Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Why keep breastfeeding?

Health Canada, the World Health Organization and the Canadian Paediatric Society recommend that babies be fed only breastmilk for the first six months of their lives (called exclusive breastfeeding), then be fed solid foods with continued breastfeeding for two years and beyond.

Breastfeeding protects both maternal and child health. Many of the protective effects of breastfeeding are dose related: the longer a child is breastfed or receives human milk, the greater the protective effect against disease, for both mother and child.

Breastmilk:

- Helps to protect a child from common childhood illnesses such as ear and lower respiratory tract infections, as well as diarrhea.
- Decreases a child's risk of diabetes, childhood cancers and obesity later in life. Children who are not breastfed are at greater risk for these chronic diseases.
- Supports a child's immune system. Some of the illness-fighting cells that are present in breastmilk increase during the second year of lactation. This makes breastfeeding two years and beyond very important to a toddler's health.
- Continues to be a valuable source of nutrition for children, well beyond one year of age. Necessary vitamins, minerals and energy continue to be supportive of healthy growth and development.
- Is very important to maternal health as well. Women who are breastfeeding or expressing their milk have a decreased risk of breast and ovarian cancers, as well as depression, cardiovascular disease, and type 2 diabetes.

Did you know?

Mothers who breastfeed after returning to work take less time off work to care for ill children. This is because breastfed children get sick less often!



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What are the options for continued breastfeeding?

There are several ways to continue breastfeeding or providing expressed breastmilk after returning to work or school.

Options include:

- Having someone bring your child to work or school to be breastfed. Employers and schools will accommodate this as breastfeeding is a protected human right.
- Expressing breastmilk at work or school and storing it in a fridge, or insulated cooler with ice pack. Expressed breastmilk can then be fed to your child in your absence.
- Breastfeeding while you are with your child at home, but not expressing breastmilk or breastfeeding while at work or school. Milk supply will adjust to meet the needs of your child. However, once breastmilk supply has decreased, it may be difficult to increase again at a later time.

What are my rights?

The Ontario Human Rights Commission states that you have the right to breastfeed your child, or to express your breastmilk, while at work or school. To learn more about this human right, visit: <http://www.ohrc.on.ca>

What must an employer do?

- Protect and support your right to breastfeed and/or express breastmilk
- Give you enough time to breastfeed or express your breastmilk
- Give you an appropriate place that is clean and private to breastfeed or express your breastmilk

Tips for returning to work:

Before you return:

- Talk to your employer about your plans to breastfeed or express your breastmilk
- Talk to other breastfeeding mothers who spend time away from their children
- Practice expressing breastmilk by hand or pump
- Buy an insulated cooler bag to store breastmilk, or ensure there is a fridge at work or school that you can use to store your expressed milk
- Review the *Storing Expressed Breastmilk* handout, which can be found at www.york.ca/breastfeeding

While you are at work or school:

- Wear a supportive and comfortable bra
- Express your milk when you feel full or uncomfortable, about every 3-5 hours (depending upon the age of your child)
- Expect that it may take days or weeks for your breastmilk supply to adjust to the amount of milk being removed

What will be helpful for my child?

- Breastfeed right before you leave the house and when you are reunited with your child again. Your child may wish to breastfeed frequently during the evening as well.
- Breastfeed on demand when you are with your child.
- Understand that it is not unusual for children to want to breastfeed more often at night once separated from their mothers in the day. This may be short term, as your child adjusts to a new routine.
- If you will not be directly breastfeeding your child at school or in the workplace, have your child practice drinking in another way. An open cup can be introduced, initially with help, from six months onward. If you decide to feed expressed breastmilk from a bottle, remember that artificial nipples may lead to earlier weaning from direct breastfeeding.
- By 18 months, children should be breastfeeding and/or drinking from a cup without a lid. Using a bottle or sippy cup should stop by 18 months, as prolonged use may lead to dental problems.

How can my childcare provider support breastfeeding?

Choose a childcare provider who:

- Understands that breastfeeding is important to health
- Will support your breastfeeding goals, and welcome you to breastfeed during drop-off and pick-up
- Accepts expressed breastmilk to feed your child in your absence
- Has a policy about how to store and offer expressed breastmilk

Remember, breastfeeding and expressing breastmilk at work, school or in public is a human right in Ontario. You have the right to breastfeed anywhere, anytime!



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