



# Breastfeeding and Returning to Work or School

You can continue breastfeeding!



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## **Being inclusive is important to us.**

WIC supports all ways of feeding babies with human milk. This includes breastfeeding, chestfeeding, and exclusive pumping. In this handout, we use words like “breastfeeding parent” and “milk” to include all families and feeding experiences. We may also use the words “breastfeeding,” “mothers” and “lactation” but the information is for all parents and caregivers.



# You Can Continue to Breastfeed

**Congratulations!** You are giving your baby the best possible start in life by breastfeeding. Studies have shown the longer you breastfeed, the fewer illnesses your child will have. Also, if your baby gets sick, it is likely to be less severe. This means you may miss fewer days of work or school.

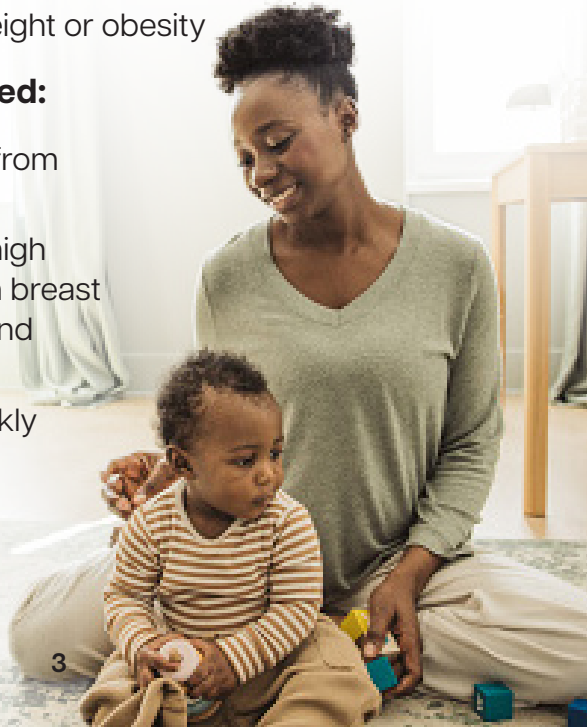
As your baby grows, your milk changes to meet your baby's nutritional needs.

## **Breastfed babies have:**

- Fewer ear infections
- Less chance of having allergies or asthma
- Less diarrhea and constipation
- Less chance of developing type 2 diabetes
- Less chance of overweight or obesity

## **Parents who breastfeed:**

- Recover more quickly from childbirth
- Are less likely to have high blood pressure, certain breast and ovarian cancers, and type 2 diabetes
- Lose weight more quickly
- Share a special bond with your baby



The health benefits of breastfeeding last throughout your baby's life. You are giving something to your baby that no one else can provide. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that babies be breastfed for two years of life or longer as mother and baby choose.

"I'm glad I continued breastfeeding after returning to work. I love the closeness I have with my baby when I'm breastfeeding. I love having one thing that I can do for my baby that no one else can, especially considering I'm back at work and other people are helping take care of him."

**Elizabeth, WIC Parent**

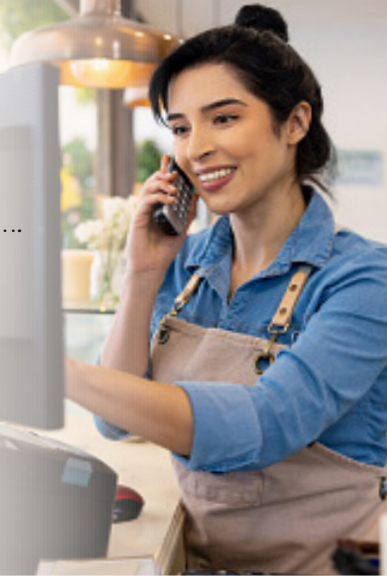
"I am so grateful to WIC for providing me so many ideas! I wanted to breastfeed and needed to work. I talked to my boss in the field and since I work close to my babysitter, he let me go to her house 2 times a day to breastfeed my baby. I am lucky, it's not always that easy for all of us but you should not be afraid to communicate with your mayordomo (boss). I am grateful he was on the same page as me and my breastfeeding wishes."

**Beatrice, WIC Parent**

# Your Rights at Work or School

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There are laws in place to help you meet your breastfeeding goals, including laws supporting breastfeeding and pumping at work or school.



## Work

California employers must allow working parents to continue breastfeeding after returning to work by providing:

- A clean, private place, other than a bathroom to express or pump your breastmilk.
- Reasonable break time to express or pump your breastmilk each time it is needed.



For more information about laws for work and breastfeeding support, visit

[California Breastfeeding Coalition Lactation Rights](#)

[California WIC Association Lactation Support](#)

[LAB §1030-1034](#)

## School

Most public schools and colleges in California provide space on their campuses and time for a student to breastfeed their baby or pump, including:

- Access to a private and secure room to breastfeed or express breastmilk
- Permission to bring a breast pump to school
- Access to a power source for a breast pump
- Access to a place to store breastmilk safely
- Reasonable time to breastfeed their baby or pump

For more information about the laws for school, visit

[California Department of Public Health Lactation Accommodation](#)

Public Schools [EDC §222](#)

Colleges [EDC §66271.9](#)



### California Breastfeeding Coalition

has information on your state and federal rights and how to file a complaint if your rights are violated.

# Benefits for Employees and Businesses

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**Studies show that employers who support breastfeeding have employees who:**

- Miss fewer work days because baby may be sick less often
- Stay in the job longer
- Get more work done
- Are loyal to the company
- Have lower healthcare costs



# Preparing to Return to Work or School

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**Making a plan for returning to work or school will help you feel more prepared. Some suggestions that other parents have found helpful include:**

- Breastfeed your baby when they show hunger cues. This will help your body make enough milk.
- Find out if your WIC office or healthcare provider offers a breastfeeding support group.

- Practice using your [breast pump](#). Start pumping and storing your milk about 2-3 weeks before your return date.
- Start offering your baby a bottle using [paced bottled feeding](#) about 2-3 weeks before your return date.
- Ask the caregiver who will be watching your baby to offer the bottle to your baby. A practice bottle can have one ounce. Aim for a few practices per week.
- Take as much time as you can for your parental leave. Talk to your boss or human resources department about your options. Learn more about California's leave programs from the [Employment Development Department](#).



## Important Conversations Before Returning to Work or School

Learning how others have met their goals can be inspiring. Here is advice from other parents to help you meet your breastfeeding goals:

### Work

Some parents find it helpful to ask their work about their breastfeeding policies during pregnancy, or a few weeks before returning.



**Connect with and learn from friends, family and coworkers** who have experienced returning to work and breastfeeding.



**Talk to your human resources department** if your employer has one. Ask about [company policies](#) to help you breastfeed or pump while at work.



**Talk to your boss and create a schedule** so you can pump or breastfeed your baby during breaks. Most parents need about 15-20 minutes to pump milk or feed their baby. Often, 2-3 breaks will be needed in a workday. Keep this conversation open, as your pumping needs may change as your baby grows.

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**Start back to work in the middle of your work week.** Having a short first week will help you and your baby adjust.

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**Ask about flexible options.** Start back to work part time, job-share with another employee, work from home, or bring your baby to work.

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## School

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**Connect with and learn from friends, family and other students** who have experienced returning to school and breastfeeding.

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**Talk to your school administrator.** They can help you with scheduling options and finding a space to pump or feed your baby.

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**Notify your instructors about any breastfeeding or pumping needs that you may have.**

This includes break time during long classes or permission to turn off the camera for virtual classes.

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# Finding a Private Space to Breastfeed or Pump

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Space to breastfeed or pump [might look different in every workplace or school](#). This space must be safe, clean, and have a surface to place a breast pump and personal items. It must also have a place to sit, and access to electricity for a pump.

Here are some common options:

- A room with a door, like an office or storage room.
- Another area that can become a private space. Room dividers, partitions, curtains, a pop-up or canopy tent, or even a vehicle with screens can be used.



**Tip:**

For your privacy and comfort, use music or a fan to cover the sound of your pump.

# Choosing a Breast Pump

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**WIC can help you with the education and support you may need to begin your pumping journey.**

Call your health plan's member services or doctor's office if you plan to pump your milk for your baby. If you cannot get a pump from your health plan, contact WIC for support. WIC parents who work full time or attend school for long hours may be eligible for an electric breast pump at no cost. A WIC counselor can teach you how to set up, use, and clean the pump.



# How Often and When to Pump

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**Your WIC counselor can help you find the pumping plan that will work for you. Your pumping plan may change as your baby grows.**

- A good starting point for how often to pump is to match the number of times you are currently breastfeeding. For most parents, this is every 2–3 hours.

- Most parents use their morning and afternoon break times and part of their lunch break to pump their milk.
- Do not wait until your breasts feel full to pump.
- With a double electric pump, each pumping session will take about 15–20 minutes. Allow time to get to and from the pumping space and to wash your hands and equipment.



### **Relax.**

Before pumping, take a few deep breaths and think about your baby. Some women bring a photo or recording of their baby's coos to help get their milk flowing.

### **Sample Pumping Schedule for an 8-Hour Work Day**

**Before work 7 a.m.** – Breastfeed

**Break 10 a.m.** – Pump

**Lunch 12:30 p.m.** – Pump

**Break 3 p.m.** – Pump

**After work 5:30 p.m.** – Breastfeed.  
Watch for and respond to your baby's hunger and fullness cues to breastfeed your baby.



## Hand Expression

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Every breastfeeding parent can learn to hand express their milk. You never know when your pump might stop working or you may forget a part of the pump at home. Using hand expression along with pumping can also increase the amount of milk you are able to store for your baby.

**To hand express:**

- Wash your hands.
- Use a clean container with a wide opening to collect your milk.



### Step 1:

Position your thumb above the nipple and your fingers below the nipple about 1–2 inches behind your nipple. Your thumb and fingers will make the letter “C” shape.

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### Step 2:

Press your fingers and thumb back toward your chest.

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### Step 3:

Gently compress your fingers and thumb together without lifting or moving fingers.

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### Step 4:

Release and then repeat. Move your hand in a circular pattern around your breast after every few compressions or whenever milk flow stops. Moving around your breast helps you release all of your milk.

Illustrations provided by B. Elliott.

# Making Enough Milk for Your Baby

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- Breastfeeding your baby is the best way to make more milk. The more often you breastfeed or pump your milk, the more milk you will make. Breastfeed often when you and your baby are together.
- Pump as often as you would breastfeed at home. When you are at work, school, or away, pump every 2–3 hours to make enough milk for your baby.
- Massage your breasts gently while pumping. This can increase how much milk you make and the calorie content of your milk.
- Your pump’s fit is important. The flange is the horn part of the pump. It is placed on the breast and centered over the nipple. The flange size and suction level can be adjusted for your comfort.
- Take good care of your breast pump. Check the pump’s instructions for when to replace certain parts so the pump continues to work well.
- Talk to your WIC counselor, lactation consultant, or health care provider if you have concerns about your pump’s fit or making enough milk. They can give you more tips that are right for you.

Learn more about how your body makes milk in [Your WIC Guide to Breastfeeding](#).



# Breastmilk Storage



## Breastmilk storage guidelines for healthy full-term babies

When you are storing breastmilk, you can use it fresh, refrigerate it, or freeze it to use later. Ask your WIC counselor what storing options make the most sense for you and your baby. Get some tips and learn more at [MyFamily.WIC.ca.gov](http://MyFamily.WIC.ca.gov), [Breastmilk Storage](#).

### Storage Locations and Temperatures

| Type of Breastmilk   | Countertop<br>77° F (25° C) or colder (room temperature)     | Refrigerator<br>40° F (4° C)  | Freezer<br>0° F (-18° C) or colder   |
|--|--|-------------------------------|--|
| Freshly Expressed or Pumped  | Up to <b>4 Hours</b>   | Up to <b>4 Days</b>           | Within <b>6 months</b> is best<br><br>Up to <b>12 months</b> is acceptable |
| Thawed, Previously Frozen  | <b>1–2 Hours</b>   | Up to <b>1 Day</b> (24 hours) | <b>Never refreeze</b> human milk after it has been thawed                  |
| <b>Leftover From a Feeding</b><br>(baby did not finish the bottle) | Use within <b>2 hours</b> after the baby is finished feeding |                               |  |

# Child Care: Things to think about

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## Choose a Child Care Center that Supports Breastfeeding

Many child care centers support breastfeeding by:

- Providing a private space to breastfeed or pump milk
- Allowing and encouraging breastfeeding at the center
- Training all providers to prepare, feed, and store breastmilk properly
- Developing a breastfeeding-friendly feeding plan with each family
- Making sure babies are fed breastmilk according to their plan
- Ensuring families label their breastmilk for use at the center

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has [information for child care providers](#) supporting breastfeeding.



## Preparing For Child Care Outside Your Home

- Find a child care provider who supports breastfeeding and is nearby.
- Take your baby to the child care center to get your baby used to it.
- Make time to hold and hug your baby after their day at the child care center. Your milk will build up immunities to germs from the child care center and pass that protection on to your baby.

## Tips to Share with Your Child Care Provider

### About your milk:

- Ask your child care provider how they would like you to store and label your milk.
- Your child care provider might not have seen breastmilk before. Your milk will separate and have a cream layer on top. They simply need to swirl the milk to mix it up.
- The refrigerated milk can be warmed by placing the bag or bottle in a cup of warm water for a few minutes.



## Feeding your child:

- Ask your child care provider to [hold your baby while feeding the bottle](#).
- Offer a blanket, pillowcase, or item of clothing with the scent of your breastmilk on it. They can place it between them and your baby for feedings. If your baby is having a hard time, the scent of your milk may help to calm them.
- Breastfed babies usually eat smaller more frequent meals. Your baby will probably eat every 2–3 hours.
- Tell your child care provider to feed your baby about 2 hours before you will be there. Breastfeed your baby as soon as you are together again.



# Teaching Caregivers about Paced Bottle Feeding

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When your caregiver bottle feeds baby at a comfortable pace, baby can let them know, “I need a break” or “I am full.” Letting a baby set the pace means less chance of overfeeding, gas, stomach discomfort, and spitting up.

**Is baby hungry?** Feed baby when you see hunger cues:

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- Keeps hands near mouth
- Bends arms and legs toward body
- Makes sucking noises
- Puckers lips
- Searches for nipple (roots)



## 2

**Offer a bottle.** Here are 5 easy tips to feeding baby.

- Always hold baby and the bottle when feeding.
- Hold baby almost upright.
- Brush the bottle nipple across baby's upper lip. Wait for baby's mouth to open.
- Hold the bottle in an almost flat position. This position keeps the milk from pouring into baby's mouth. The nipple will fill and baby will suck on the bottle.
- Let baby pause and take breaks every few sucks. The baby may feed for about 15–20 minutes.



### 3

**Stop when baby is full.** Watch for these fullness cues.

- Sucks slower or stops sucking
- Relaxes hands and arms
- Turns away from nipple
- Pushes away
- Falls asleep

Learn more about [paced bottle feeding](#).





**WIC provides breastfeeding and infant feeding support services to all families.**  
Call your local WIC office with any questions.



**California Department of Public Health, California WIC program**  
*This institution is an equal opportunity provider.*

**1-800-852-5770 | [MyFamily.WIC.ca.gov](http://MyFamily.WIC.ca.gov)**

Rev 02/26

*Some content compliments of  
Texas Health and Human Services, Texas WIC program*