

## Returning from Maternity Leave: Tips for Working Mothers

Many women combine motherhood with a job or career outside the home. If you're a new mother planning to return to work, you may be wondering just how you're going to manage both successfully.

It will be a challenge, but being a working mother is something you can manage — if you plan ahead. Prepare yourself for the demands of being a working mother, including how you'll cope with leaving your baby and the logistics of breast-feeding.

### Emotional issues for the working mother: Parting with your infant

Returning to work poses emotional conflicts for new mothers. You might have feelings of guilt over leaving your baby in child care, but you might also feel relieved to be back at work. You're juggling more in your life — not only the usual work hours, dinner preparation, household chores, time for yourself and time with your partner, but now the time-consuming tasks and pleasures of your new baby.

Here are some things you can do, both before you go on leave and once you return to your job, that can help ease your transition back to work.

### Before you return to work

- **Decide on a return-to-work date.** Discuss with your employer your options for how much time you can take for maternity leave. You might not have the luxury of deciding whether or not to return to work, but you can take as much time as you're allowed. Choose a day that's later in the week to make your first week back to work a short one.
- **Find dependable child care.** The thought of leaving your newborn in someone else's care can be troubling. Finding a reliable child care provider whom you trust can ease your mind considerably. Your child care options range from individual in-home care to a child care center. Give yourself time to research facilities in your area and to get on waiting lists, if necessary.
- **Have a talk with your boss.** Discuss your job duties and schedule so you'll know what's expected of you when you return. If your workplace offers some flexibility, ask about flexible hours or working from home on occasion. Be prepared to suggest ways of making a more flexible arrangement work.

### Once you're back at work

- **Manage your time and be organized.** Combining a job with raising a child demands honed time management and organizational skills. You have a lot of responsibilities, and to make sure they're all attended to — and that you maintain some sense of sanity — set up a system for making sure everything gets done. Too many demands and not enough of you to go around means you may have to let less important matters slide.
- **Stay connected.** Find little ways to stay connected with your baby when you're away from him or her. Plan a daily phone call to see how your baby's doing. Keep some photos on your desk. Look forward to spending time with your baby that evening.

- **Make backup plans.** There will be days when your baby is sick or your child care center is closed. Be prepared with alternative plans on those days. Check with your employer beforehand about taking time off when your child is sick. Talk with a family member or close friend in advance about filling in if you can't bring your baby to child care.
- **Accept that you'll feel guilty or sad at times.** If you're like a lot of mothers, you'll struggle with feelings of guilt. You might feel sad that you can't spend as much time as you'd like with your baby. These feelings are common, and it might help to discuss them with your friends or other mothers in similar circumstances. Talk to your spouse about how you're feeling. If your sadness or guilty feelings are increasing or overwhelming, mention them to your doctor.
- **Establish a support system.** Give up trying to do it all yourself. Accept help from your partner, family members and friends. Seek out other working mothers who can offer support as you make the transition back to work.
- **Take time for yourself.** As difficult as this may seem, take time to nurture your own well-being. Taking the baby for a walk is enjoyable for your baby, and it's good exercise for you. Rely on easy-to-prepare meals or a relaxing bath after putting your baby to bed to help ease stress. If you feel less stressed, you'll be able to better enjoy your baby when you're together.
- **Get as much rest as possible.** You'll have times when you feel so tired you'll wonder how you can do it all. Unfortunately, fatigue goes hand in hand with being a new parent. Try going to bed early one night each week to catch up on sleep. Cut down on unnecessary commitments. Set aside time on weekends to take a nap while your baby is sleeping. The better rested you are, the easier it will be to handle those everyday problems that crop up.

Combining motherhood with work isn't easy. Certainly you'll have days when you won't feel like going to work, especially if your baby is fussy or seems particularly clingy. But as you and your child become used to your schedule, as your baby settles into a routine and as you become more adept at managing multiple demands, you'll learn how to handle these normal ups and downs.