



Returning to work after having a baby (from a medical perspective)

Key points

- Returning to work can be a very daunting experience
- There is never a right time to return to work and this will depend on many factors (current employment, change to part-time, financial need)
- There will be many questions running through your head and many emotions to deal with, all of which are very normal.

Psychological

- It is normal to experience a range of emotions when faced with the prospect of returning to work
- How do you recognise when the negative feelings need to be addressed with external help from family/friends or even professional help?

When these feelings begin to cause functional challenges and begin to interfere with your daily functioning at work and at home. For example:

- Lack of focus and concentration
- Feeling low in mood or being tearful a lot of the time
- Feeling anxious and panicky that it interferes with getting things done at home/work
- Disturbed sleep or insomnia - not due to your baby's sleep cycle
- Not getting any enjoyment from activities you normally enjoy – reading book, watching TV
- Feeling the need to check-in with the carer of your baby very frequently that it begins to interfere your work
- Worrying about your baby all the time, worrying something bad will happen to your baby

Postpartum mood disorders are very common. These can occur anytime during your baby's first year and are often under diagnosed but are treatable. An assessment can be made by a doctor using a validated questionnaire

Physical symptoms

- It's common to feel more tired when you return to work because of lack of sleep and caring for your baby.
- However there are medical reasons for **fatigue post-natally** – low iron, abnormal thyroid function, post-natal depression, physical changes to your body.

So if you are feeling more tired than usual, then think about getting a medical review to rule out reversible medical causes.

- **Breast-feeding issues** - mastitis may be more common due to the reduced number of feeds and build-up of milk
- **Back pain** – if you have an office job, weak core and pelvic muscles post-natally may contribute to back pain. Get up and walk, stretch during breaks and consider pilates/ exercises to strength core/ pelvic muscles.

What about the bond with my baby?

- There is no scientific evidence that suggests that children are harmed when their mothers work outside the home. The American Academy of Paediatrics reports that a child who is emotionally well adjusted, well loved, and well cared for will thrive regardless of whether his mother works outside the home

What if my baby gets sick?

- Do you have a **contingency plan** of what to do if your child falls sick?
- **Caregiver** – give them clear written instructions, ask them to record events such as how much did baby drink/ eat, how many nappy changes, any other events you are keeping track of

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mum’s separation anxiety – photos of your baby at work, ask your caregiver to send you photos. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider getting First Aid Training for yourself and your caregiver • Ensure your caregiver has all the necessary emergency numbers for A&E and your GP/paediatrician as well as family/friend contact numbers
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Practical solutions to consider	Pumping and freezing milk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider your options for new jobs and talk to your boss if you have an existing job – full-time with some days at home or part-time, commission basis, job share • Having a support network of working mothers • Making time for yourself • Recognising when you may need to reach out for help from partner/ family/friends or professional help • Getting organized – multi-tasking, cooking and freezing meals, • Moderate your expectation – expect the best but also be realistic that it may be a challenge and it will take time to find the balance that suits you and baby • Precook breakfast? You can despite the morning rush. Healthy breakfast for the working mother is needed as the nutrients are needed for baby. You can pre-prepare breakfast and take to work with you/eat before you leave <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grease a muffin tin or line with strips of bacon and cook. Crack an egg into each muffin cup, season and return to oven. These can be frozen and or sit in fridge for a few days. They are easy to eat alone or in a sandwich. You may find they don’t even last the week! - Freeze fresh berries and aging bananas into portion sizes. Take out of freezer and straight into blender with yogurt and some milk. Blend and enjoy 2 portions of fruits and dairy before work. • Clothing post-baby and ready for work: Allow time to return to pre-pregnancy weight. Eat healthy and breast feed to return to your regular weight. Meanwhile enjoy new clothing post pregnancy that allows for pumping professional mothers. If you are feeling frumpy ensure to have an appointment at the hair salon and ensure a mai/pedi is on your to-do list to mentally prepare yourself for work. • Dry Run: practice a couple dry-runs of the morning routine before your first day of work. Get up as if you are preparing the family for work and school, take transportation to work to time how long the morning process takes. This knowledge of how the mornings will go (when running smoothly) and help to reduce your stress • Be organized: outfits chosen and ready for the morning Bags packed Lunches made in the fridge Will reduce your stress, will encourage family to be responsible for their kit and ease everyone out the door smoothly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressed Breast milk (EBM) can be store in the fridge freezer for up to 6 months and for 12 months in a deep freeze. Date your freezer bags and try to use the older EBM first. Warm smaller volumes of milk as the remaining volume not ingested needs to be thrown out. • Initiate one or two feeds with another caregiver (dad, helper) via bottle while you are home to allow time to find the correct nipple for baby. This will take time to choose the most comfortable shape. Be sure to choose the correct size of hole in the nipple according to baby’s age and ability to manage the milk flow from the nipple. • Ensure a minimum of 2 breastfeeds per day to maintain milk supply. Breast feeding less than twice a day can pose risk to reducing milk supply. • If your milk supply is low you can initiate feeds with EBM then top up with formula feed. Do not mix EBM with formula. • Develop a routine: develop bonding time for dad in the evening with skin to skin contact and a bottle of EBM and burping. Have the nanny attempt a top up feed after breastfeeding to allow time for baby to establish bonding time with nanny. Settling to bed: try to have dad and the nanny also settle baby to bed. This provides the baby with getting used to other adults other than Mom for comfort and soothing. This gives mom a bit of an evening break as well. • Breast pump: there are many brands to choose and it is best to research which will best suit your needs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Consider the number of parts and pieces, ease of cleaning, manual or electric, replacement parts. Some good brands: Medala, Ameda, Spectra. -Choose a carry bag for your pump, consider choosing a style that is professional and discreet for your work environment. -Nursing pads, always carry extra disposable nursing pads. Keep your pump clean, wash the bottles/parts frequently with soapy water, rinse and boil/sterilize. Refrigerate the EBM immediately. • Once expressed be sure to place the EBM in the fridge. The bag you chose also should act as a cooler when carrying the EBM home in the evening.