

WORKING AND BREASTFEEDING – MY EXPERIENCE

By an Anonymous Mum

This is one Mothers story of how she was able to combine breastfeeding and working...

As I had always intended, I arranged to return to work after my SMP and holiday pay ran out in Jan 2004, when my son was 6 months old. I was extremely fortunate in that my employer had a workplace nursery on site so I was reassured to know that I wouldn't be far away from my baby.

Having struggled for 12 weeks to establish breastfeeding, it had become incredibly important for me to continue as long as I could, especially now that I could feed him easily and without pain. Whilst on maternity leave I also attended a breastfeeding peer-supporter course and had become even more aware of the benefits of breastfeeding and the disadvantages of formula. I was lucky that my line manager at work was a friend as well as my boss, and when I discussed my return to work with him I said that it was on condition that I would be able to continue to feed my son. The way I saw it my employer had to provide somewhere for me to express if I wanted to, so as the nursery was so close it was quicker to go and feed him rather than express. My boss was fully supportive of me visiting the nursery to feed my son – he was just glad I was returning to work.

My job was mostly based in Swindon, with the occasional day-visits to London or elsewhere in the UK. I was able to manage my diary to ensure that meetings were arranged so they avoided feeding times. When I first returned to work my son had only just started on solids and was routinely having 4 milk feeds a day – 2 of which were within the working day. The first few weeks I felt quite nervous about how it would all work, but I found it relatively easy to manage my diary, and was able to insist meetings were held in Swindon rather than London. Being able to nip over to the nursery twice a day (usually around 10:30am and 3pm) to feed my son compensated a bit for the stress and guilt of being back at work full-time. The nursery was also fantastic, they followed every instruction I gave them and never once expressed any annoyance with my regular visits.

Looking back on it I think I indulged my son with the feeding, probably due to mother's guilt at being back at work! We went from a very established routine of 4 feeds a day, to him sneaking in extra feeds in the early evening when we got home and in the middle of the night. Not that it matters, as it made us both feel better! Things settled back down again after about a month or so.

By the end of the first month my son had become established on 2 solid meals a day at nursery and they asked if I could come and feed him after his lunch, which they usually had at 11:30am. This led to him having one milk feed during the working day at lunchtime – an easy time to escape the office! This continued until he was one year old. At this point I found that he was falling asleep almost as soon as I started feeding him, so I decided to call it a day on the lunchtime feed – a sad moment as it meant the end of my visits to see him.

I did get paranoid at times as to what my colleagues thought of me leaving the office (for up to an hour a day initially) to breastfeed, but to be honest I don't think most people even noticed or knew what I was doing, and if they had they would probably have been too embarrassed to mention it. Plus I was probably spending less time out of the office than smokers do when they nip out for a quick fag several times a day! I do think my employer benefited greatly from me continuing to breastfeed – I can count on one hand the times I had to work from home as my son was excluded from nursery for sickness, which was significantly less than all the other babies at the nursery. It also played a great part in maintaining my morale during the difficult transition back to work. I, in return, accepted that there was an element of give and take, and went on occasional planned visits away from the office – planned so that I was able to provide the nursery with expressed milk.

The success of this didn't hang at all on my employer's policies but entirely on my line manager's attitude. He was supportive and understanding and made it as easy as possible for me to return to work and to continue breastfeeding. The nursery being so close to the office helped too! Ultimately it worked because I was 100% determined to continue feeding my son and from my experience I think that successful breastfeeding only does come with determination. I'm extremely proud of the fact that I fed him until he was 16 months old – something I only dreamed of in those first 3 months!