Making it Work:
Assisting and Empowering New Mothers
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Objectives:
1. Identify at least two ways to help breastfeeding moms obtain needed support, including family support, as they prepare to and once they return to work;
2. List at least two solutions for facilitating worksite support for moms; and
3. Describe strategies for empowering breastfeeding moms to approach employers for breastfeeding support at work.

Profile of Working Women
- National legislation in the United States under the Affordable Care Act requires employers to provide hourly workers with reasonable time and private space that is not a bathroom to express milk during the work period. *(DOL, Bureau of Labor Statistics)*
- Today nearly 60% of women are in the workforce in the United States, and similar figures are seen in many developed countries across the world.
- Women with children are the fastest growing segment of the workforce. Today in the U.S., 71.4% of women with children are in the work force, and 56% of women with infants under the age of 1 are in the work force. *(DOL, Bureau of Labor Statistics)*

Common Barriers to Breastfeeding Among Employed Women
- Around 80% of breastfeeding women discontinue breastfeeding within the first month back at work. *(Cardenas 2005)*
- Challenges include:
  - Short maternity leave
  - Emotional and physical demands
  - Lack of support from family
  - Lack of accommodations in the workplace
  - Lack of support from employer and co-workers
- Emotional challenges include role conflicts, competing demands, fatigue, sadness, and guilt.

Barriers of Low-Wage Earners
For women working in low-wage jobs, additional challenges can make breastfeeding difficult, including:
- Earlier return to work
- Faster return to work among African American mothers
- Job settings that are not conducive to milk expression or breastfeeding
- Lack of job autonomy and flexibility
- Erratic work schedules and nonstandard hours
- Lack of job security; perception that women are replaceable (therefore leading to hesitancy bringing up breastfeeding needs with supervisors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Reality</th>
<th>Low-Wage Earners</th>
<th>Middle Income Workers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can Take Off to care for Sick Child</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>54%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have a say in when to take breaks</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>57%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have a say in the start/ quitting time</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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**Health Impact of Low-Wage Environments**
- Increases in chronic diseases
- Fewer health benefits and paid sick leave
- Increased levels of stress
- Increased perception of fatigue
- Resource: *Nickel and Dimed* (Ehrenreich 2001)

**Findings from the New York Department of Health Mothers:**
- WIC mothers are not aware of their rights under either the Federal or New York state nursing breaks laws
- Though all women wanted to continue breastfeeding, most were not comfortable talking with their male supervisor about their needs; women need advice and language for how to begin the conversation
- Co-workers are not always supportive of breastfeeding employees
- Biggest issues are lack of time and private space
- Women need help to navigate breastfeeding at work
- Other onsite challenges include eating a meal or snack and expressing milk at the same time
- WIC mothers tend to rely on family members to provide free childcare support; not all families are knowledgeable about breastfeeding or eager to care for a breastfed child
Employers:
- Lack knowledge about both Federal and state breastfeeding laws (particularly among smaller companies without an HR manager)
- Are unaware of the bottom line benefits to the business for supporting nursing moms at work
- Have never or rarely thought about the issue
- Lack knowledge about the needs of nursing women
- Are embarrassed about breastfeeding and are uncomfortable discussing it
- Would support a breastfeeding mom if requested; however, most do not recall ever having been approached
- Are more willing to support a “responsible” employee
- Have barriers:
  - Worry that women will “take advantage” of the privilege
  - Lack available space to accommodate nursing women
  - Believe that giving up break time will be too costly for the business

Federal and State Legislation
- Federal legislation housed under Section 7 of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938
- Language of federal legislation:
  - “Reasonable Time”
  - “Private space shielded from view from coworkers and the public”
  - Space cannot be a bathroom
  - Milk expression breaks do not have to be paid
  - Limited to hourly workers considered “non-exempt”
- New York laws:
  - Are not limited to non-exempt workers
  - Provide protection up to 3 years

Helping Mothers Prepare for their Return to Work
- Support for mothers begins by helping her identify her goals and then providing information and support to help her reach her family’s goals.
- Mothers also need:
  - A supportive work environment
  - Adequate maternity leave
  - Flexible return to work options
  - Direct access to the baby
  - Private time and space to express milk
  - Access to professional support
  - Support from managers and coworkers
  - Support from family (partner and female relatives are especially critical)
During Maternity Leave

- Establish milk production through evidence-based practices
- Importance of the magical first hour for building milk supply
- Skin to skin contact in the first hour – and beyond
- Frequent milk removal
- Using maternity leave to exclusively breastfeed to build production capacity
- Getting help with early problems

After Returning to Work

- The “magic” number (Mohrbacher 2012) -
- Use the supply – but replace it!
- Breastfeed exclusively when home with the baby
- Finding a relaxing area to express milk
- Setting up a realistic pumping schedule (Wright 2013) -
  [http://lactationmatters.org/2012/05/17/pumping-strategies-for-the-working-mother/](http://lactationmatters.org/2012/05/17/pumping-strategies-for-the-working-mother/)
- Using expressed milk

Building Milk Production

- Skin to skin helps increase production
- Fully empty breasts at least once daily
- Breastfeed at night
- Power pumping (concept by Cathy Genna)
- Frequent milk removal and breast stimulation
- Hands-on milk expression (Jane Morton)

Back at Work

- Getting organized
  - Pumping schedules
  - Phasing back to work
  - Preparing baby for mom’s return to work
- Approaching supervisors
  - Just ask!
  - Begin during pregnancy
  - Focus on mother’s needs and her desire to be a productive employee
  - Be honest about the importance of breastfeeding to the family
  - Consider a letter from the mother’s or baby’s physician(s)
  - Provide solutions to address barriers; use the “My Lactation and Work Plan” – New York “Breastfeeding Partners” – [www.breastfeedingpartners.org](http://www.breastfeedingpartners.org)
  - Provide resources from HHS Office on Women’s Health
- Dealing with co-workers
  - “Breaks are predictable; absences are not!”
  - Establishing a sense of teamwork
Engaging family members
- Include them in counseling and education efforts
- Consider the “ask” for partners and grandmothers caring for the baby
- Provide simple guidelines on handling human milk

Creative solutions for break time for expressing milk
- Reasonable breaks protected under law
- Using standard breaks (fixed or as needed)
- Going home to breastfeed
- Bringing baby to work
- Staff coverage options (floater staff, supervisor/manager provides coverage, staff help each other out)

Creative solutions for private space
- Permanent space options
- Flexible space options
- Outdoor/mobile options

Empowering mothers and building confidence

Resources for Supporting Nursing Moms
Office on Women’s Health
- Presentation platform available for downloading at the website of the United States Breastfeeding Committee at: www.usbreastfeeding.org/SNMW-platform.
- HRSA Maternal and Child Health Bureau

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Cathy’s Pinterest:
http://www.pinterest.com/cathycarothers/breastfeeding-resources
http://www.pinterest.com/cathycarothers/breastfeeding-resources-workplace/
References


Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Section 4201, “Reasonable Break Time for Nursing Mothers”, HR 3590. Text of Sec. 4207 only available online at: [www.usbreastfeeding.org](http://www.usbreastfeeding.org). Full Affordable Care Act available online at: [http://docs.house.gov/rules/hr4872/111_hr3590_engrossed.pdf](http://docs.house.gov/rules/hr4872/111_hr3590_engrossed.pdf)


The Urban Institute. Lower-Wage Workers and Flexible Work Arrangements. 2010.


