

CHALLENGES THAT MOTHERS FACE AND STRATEGIES THAT WORK

LACK OF SUPPORT

The Issue:

Support from family (especially the baby's father and maternal grandmother), friends, and the workplace is critical. Many women report their workplace environment is also not conducive to breastfeeding or they are wary of approaching a supervisor and colleagues about their needs.

Strategies that work:

- Tell women about breastfeeding mothers' groups in your community. New mothers derive confidence from talking with other mothers who have breastfed their babies
- Start a support group for working mothers in our community
- Involve the baby's father and maternal grandmother in education efforts
- Encourage worksites to facilitate mother-to-mother support. Successful worksite support ideas used by some companies include:
 - Informal mothers' groups over lunch
 - Electronic discussions among breastfeeding employees through the company's Web site or e-mail Listserve group
 - Bulletin boards posted in lactation rooms for users to share stories and successes
- Remind employers that workplaces may make other accommodations such as fitness breaks; supporting breastfeeding employees is an added healthy benefit as it results in reduced healthcare costs for the company

LACK OF SPACE

The Issue:

Although women employed in managerial office positions may have a private office that can be locked, it is far more common for women to be stationed in modular cubicles or open spaces, or employed in job settings that lack privacy. In addition, some worksite environments are unsanitary and may not be conducive to expressing milk. In those situations, mothers should be counseled about ways to maintain their milk supply so that they can continue to breastfeed when they are home with their baby.

Strategies that Work:

- Help women develop a personal breastfeeding plan for when they return to work that accounts for work hours, environmental factors, childcare options, and milk expression/feeding options

- Help women consider creative options for expressing milk in privacy, preferably before they go out on maternity leave. Possibilities include a private office or a co-worker, a conference room, dressing room, etc.
- Encourage the mother to approach a company nurse, member of the wellness team, or supervisor about the need for a lactation room

STRESS

The Issue:

Balancing the demands of family and work can cause many women to feel fatigued and generally stressed. For some, the idea of breastfeeding can seem particularly overwhelming if they are employed in a job environment they feel will be especially challenging for breastfeeding. These stresses can be even more pronounced for first-time mothers. Fatigue often adds to the stress, although research shows that breastfeeding women are no more fatigued than non-breast-feeding women. Stress inhibits the release of oxytocin, the hormone responsible for good milk flow, preventing mothers from releasing milk and making a good milk supply.

Strategies that Work:

- Demonstrate simple relaxation techniques to help minimize fatigue and relieve stress
- Offer options for managing work and home demands
- Teach women ways to encourage the milk to “let down” or flow easily (e.g., bringing a photo, blanket, or article of clothing with the baby’s smell, soft music, warm compresses, and nipple stimulation before pumping)
- Tell women about mother-to-mother support groups in your community or already in place through a corporate lactation program, or encourage them to start a support groups at their workplace or in their community
- Help mothers to feel confident in their efforts to give their babies the best!

LACK OF FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING OPTIONS

The Issue:

Flexible breaks are not always possible in some worksite settings, such as factories and schools, among others. Women may also be concerned about schedule disruptions affecting meetings and other important time-sensitive activities that may make pumping at regular intervals a challenge.

Strategies that work:

- Explore with the mother her personal work schedule to help her devise appropriate milk expression times (approximately every three hours)
- Provide information on where to access a high quality electric breast pump to efficiently remove milk and minimize time needed to pump

- Remind women that smokers are often provided breaks to support an unhealthy practice; taking her allotted leave time to express milk is a positive practice that helps both the mother and her employer
- Encourage the mother to speak confidently with her supervisor regarding her needs
- Provide employers with information about the relatively simple needs of breastfeeding employees and evidence that their temporary needs for flexible scheduling are cost effective. This information can have a significant impact when framed in terms that are relevant to the employer

MODESTY CONCERNS

The Issue:

Sensitivity about breastfeeding is a primary barrier to breastfeeding in all regions of the United States. Although there is growing support for women breastfeeding in public, many mothers nevertheless worry that their breasts will be exposed while breastfeeding or pumping, and do not want to make other people uncomfortable. Mothers who return to work may be embarrassed to speak with supervisors about their needs, and worry about what their colleagues might say. They may also worry that their breasts will become too full and leak while at work.

Strategies that Work:

- Teach simple strategies for breastfeeding discretely
- Teach methods to prevent leaking while at work (e.g., regular milk expression, folding arms to discreetly put pressure over the breast if she feels the milk flow letting down, wearing nursing pads, and bringing along an extra sweater or jacket to cover up)
- Help mothers explore options for expressing milk when they are at work
- Help her feel proud of breastfeeding, even if people around her are not always aware of the benefits

REAL OR PERCEIVED LOW MILK SUPPLY

The Issue:

“I don’t make enough milk” is a common concern of new mothers, and the primary reason women give for weaning during the first 6 months. Research shows that practices that help establish a healthy milk supply in the early days, including frequent, efficient feeding or milk removal, have a direct positive effect on long-term milk supply. This is especially important for mothers who must be separated from their babies. Many women are not aware of how their bodies make milk, and over half of women do not have professional assistance once they are discharged from the hospital. Health professional can assist breastfeeding mothers with good information and support beginning prenatally through the postpartum period so that they can continue to have abundant milk after they return to work.

Strategies that work:

- Offer to teach a prenatal class at worksites in your community
- Teach mothers how the breast makes milk, and how to get a good start with breastfeeding through appropriate positioning and attachment of the baby

- Encourage mothers to feed their babies 8-12 times every 24 hours in the early days to help develop the important prolactin and oxytocin receptors that help ensure a healthy milk supply later on
- Tell mother where they can get help in their communities. Research show that providing new mothers with names of breastfeeding resources increases duration rates among employed women
- Encourage mothers to phase back to work gradually, if possible, to allow them to adjust to the changing needs of their bodies in maintaining milk supply. Options include: part-time work for a brief period, telecommuting from home, job sharing, or simply resuming work on a day near the end of the usual work week. Fro instance, starting on Thursday or Friday in a standard weekday job would give a breastfeeding mother an immediate weekend to adjust to the stress of being separated from her baby
- This can be tailored to the mother’s work week schedule
- Help women access a high quality electric breast pump when they return to work to continue to express milk effectively. Breast milk is produced in direct response to the amount of milk remove from the breast

