

Returning to work

A guide for parents



With thanks to our sponsors



Our thanks go to all those working mothers, line managers and organisations that contributed to creating this guide. Thank you for your time and for sharing your experiences.

Contents

How does family and work fit in my life?	4
I'm pregnant – what happens next?	6
How does this fit with my career?	12
How to tell my employer	13
How should I tell other people at work?	17
Avoiding the bumps	19
Keeping in touch & getting ready to return to work	23
Back at work	31
The home front	33
If things go wrong	35
Myth buster: FAQs for new mums	36
Further resources and information	37

Introduction

Women make up nearly half of the workforce in the UK and more than 80% will become mothers during their working life. With the average age of motherhood in the UK being 30, most women at work over this age will also be working parents.

Returning to work after having a baby is a transition. It is part of a process that begins as soon as you become pregnant. Spending some time thinking about your job and career, plus good preparation will help you to benefit from a smooth transition with a positive outcome for both you and your employer.

This guide provides the tools, tips and advice that will help you enjoy the next phase of your life as a working parent.

How does family and work fit into my life?

Your values, ambitions and feelings towards work and family do not change fundamentally with parenthood, however having a child does reveal core values more clearly.

Taking time now to understand your values, where you are in your career and where you want to be will provide the backdrop for effectively planning maternity leave and your return to work.

This section covers:

- Understanding my values
- Identifying my skills, strengths and achievements
- Where do I want to be in the future

"I find it really difficult to stop work spilling over into my home life! It's the way I have always worked. On the day I am not working I often catch up on emails and things that I can do whilst not in the office. My manager is always telling me off for this. In fact we have now agreed that he will pay me for five days. To begin with I didn't think I wanted to work full time. I am very happy to be back and I know I need to work, for me."

Victoria Smith, first time mother and manager at DHL

"I knew the focus on work and family were wrong for me. Whilst I perhaps had the job that everyone dreams of – in a chocolate factory, I felt three hours commuting and 5am starts were not what I wanted with a young family. I decided it was time to follow my dream and passion, and to start up on my own! So I swapped the world of big business for something closer to home".

Claire Martinsen, mother of two at Breckland Orchard

Understanding your values

We all work for different reasons. For most of us there is a mix of financial, social, intellectual satisfaction in work and possibly the sense of making a valued contribution. For example, 61% of working mothers say that they would continue working even if they did not need to.

Taking time now to understand your values and what working gives you or enables you to do will help identify how you want to work during the next phase of your life. Getting the balance right between work life and family life is unique for each of us.

Identifying your skills, strengths and achievements

Look back over your career to identify your key achievements and the skills and strengths you used to accomplish them.

This will enable you to:

- Make informed career decisions
- Boost your confidence and demonstrate your value
- Prepare for returning to work at the end of maternity leave
- Prepare for when you tell your boss or employer that you're pregnant

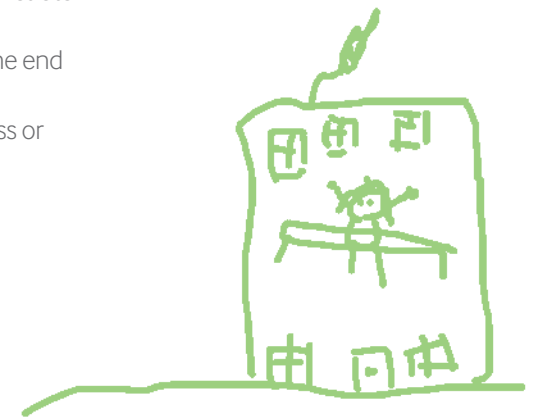
Where do I want to be in the future?

Knowing what you want in life and combining this with your values and strengths will provide the framework within which you can manage your transition through pregnancy, maternity leave and return to work.

You can get more help on identifying your values, understanding your strengths and weaknesses and looking at your future by downloading the [career assessment tool](#).

"Now I really feel I have the best of both worlds, I love being a mother and I love my work."

Vicky Hull, maternity returner at Happy



I'm pregnant – what happens next?

You are just about to start on one of the most exciting and rewarding life transitions there is! The more preparation you do before going on maternity leave the easier you will find it to return.

The foundations for a smooth return are understanding where work and family fit into your own life and knowing your rights.

This section covers:

- Basic maternity rights
- Considering your options
- Childcare

Basic maternity rights

If you are an employee you are entitled to 52 weeks maternity leave, regardless of length of service or the number of hours worked. Your maternity leave is divided into two halves:

- First 26 weeks is known as Ordinary Maternity leave (OML)
- Second 26 weeks is called Additional Maternity Leave (AML)

There are slightly different rights to return to work depending on whether you return during or at the end of OML or AML. You may start your maternity leave and pay anytime from 11 weeks before your baby is due, unless you give birth before then. You can work right up to the birth if you wish. There is a compulsory two weeks period of leave after you have given birth (unless you work in a factory, when you must take four weeks off after the birth). If you are off work with a pregnancy-related sickness during the last four weeks before your baby is due, your employer can insist you start your leave then. For more detailed information please see the Working Families fact sheet [Maternity Leave and Pay](#).

Holiday

Holiday continues to accrue over the maternity leave period; the amount depends on your employment contract and the start and end of the contractual holiday year. Returning employees often use holiday to create a phased start.

Pay

The amount of money paid whilst on maternity leave will depend on your

entitlement to Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) or Maternity Allowance (MA). Your employer may also offer enhanced benefits over and above the legal minimum, depending on the terms and conditions of your employment contract. This may be written into your contract or in a separate employee manual or handbook. You can also find out by asking your employer or union representative.

Keeping in touch days

You may work for up to 10 days without bringing maternity leave to an end or losing Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) or Maternity Allowance (MA). These days are known as Keeping In Touch days (KIT days) and can only take place if both you and your employer want them.

You cannot be made to work during maternity leave, nor can you demand to have work during maternity leave. The new regulations on KIT days do not say anything about how much an employee should be paid for working. However, there are other rules about pay – under the National Minimum Wage Act and the Equal Pay Act and your employment contract – which your employer must stick to.

You must get your SMP as normal during the week in which you work a KIT day. It will then be a matter for agreement between you and your employer as to how much you get paid on top of that.

Many employers will probably top up the SMP for the day on which you have worked in order to make it up to a normal day's pay, or they may just pay a normal day's pay on top of your SMP.

"Working KIT days was really important, it sounds wrong but work stimulates my brain in a different way and it also allows me to keep in touch with what was happening at work. As a small company of course the money you get on maternity leave is very basic, so being paid was also very helpful! I had an agreement with my line manager and my colleague who was covering me that if there was extra work that needed doing I would try to pick it up. I kept a record of my hours and this came out of my 10 KIT days allowance. It meant that we got the work done, Happy didn't suffer and I kept in touch."

Vicky Hull, maternity returner at Happy

Sarah used KIT days to get back into the swing of things before returning to work. "I booked Daphne in for trial days at nursery and then I went off and did my trial day at work! It meant that I could catch up with all the changes and get prepared for when I started for real. It also helped to pay for the nursery fees."

Sarah Green, finance clerk

To help you plan your maternity, download the planner to print out and keep as a useful [week-by-week guide](#).

I'm pregnant – what happens next?

Considering your options

Your options for maternity leave and working after your maternity leave can vary. What works for you will depend on your career ambitions, your family finances, availability of childcare and your health. Working out some possible options now will help to build a working pattern that will achieve the goals and balance you want in life.

Shorter leave

Pros

- Keeping skills fresh
- Regaining visibility and profile at work
- Keeping informal network at work alive
- Maintain level of financial income

Cons

- Possible exhaustion due to disturbed sleeping patterns
 - More difficult to continue breastfeeding
 - Possibly still hormonal and less able to cope with stress
 - May miss baby's key developmental stages
 - Possible separation anxiety with baby or mother
 - Possible difficulty in accessing suitable childcare if returning before your baby is three months old
-

Here are some of the pros and cons of different lengths of maternity leave that can be used to consider your options. There may be other pros and cons specific to your own situation, e.g. if you are a lone mother. It is worth thinking about the importance you may attribute to each of these and the timescale you are thinking of. Only you will be able to know what length of maternity leave is right.

Longer leave

Pros

- Longer to support your baby through key developmental stages
- Easier to continue breastfeeding
- Physically fitter and hormones are more settled
- Less exhaustion
- Greater likelihood of baby sleeping

Cons

- More difficult to maintain relationships at work
 - Skills can degrade over time
 - Miss key personal development milestones or opportunities
 - Reduction in financial income
-

Tips:

- **DO** consider your options now.
- **DO** find out what support your employer offers.
- **DO** discuss options of flexible working with your partner.
- **DO** discuss options for flexible working with your line manager (see the next sections for when and how to do this).
- **DON'T** make a formal decision until after your baby is born and you have had a good few weeks to see how well your baby is feeding and sleeping and how you and your partner adjust.
- **DO** consider getting great quality used items at an NCT Nearly New Sale. To find out about your nearby sales visit www.nct.org.uk.
- Family and friends love to buy presents for new babies especially if this is your first. Do help them by thinking about what it is you need.

"It's not just about managing maternity its about how we do business."

Catherine Hamilton, National Grid

Each of the maternity leave and flexible working options described above will have financial implications. For more information on financial planning for your maternity leave and working after your baby is born here are some useful online tools:

- Money for mums www.moneyformums.co.uk
- The Financial Services Authority "Money Made Clear" www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk/guides/family/having_a_baby.html
- Directgov www.direct.gov.uk



I'm pregnant – what happens next?

Childcare

It may seem very early to be thinking about childcare. Availability, flexibility and cost of childcare can vary dramatically between different areas e.g. around London and in the South East of the UK places at day nurseries and childminders can be hard to find and standards can vary. It is well worth investigating the options whilst pregnant. Finding the right childcare is the most common concern amongst mothers returning to work.

It is becoming increasingly common for both parents to take an active role in childcare. Both may request flexible working or the partner may choose to stay at home with the children, so take time to discuss the options with your partner. If you do need childcare below are the most common options:

- Childminders
- Day nurseries
- Children's centres
- Playgroups/Pre-schools
- Nursery schools
- Nannies
- Au pairs
- Family member

Sarah is a first time mother and keen to become a qualified accounting technician. Although she has returned to work part time, her line manager and employer are supporting her. "I know working part time will slow down my career progression, just because there are physically a different number of hours. But I will get to where I want to go!"

Sarah Green, finance clerk

Morag found out that she was pregnant just as she was going through the assessment process for a promotion. "I felt very guilty about applying for the role and knowing I was pregnant. In the end I decided to tell the recruiting manager about my personal circumstances. He made it very easy for me, welcoming me into the team and supporting my promotion. I quickly felt at ease working with the new team."

Morag Evans, first time mum and manager at DHL

Factors to consider when weighing up the options for childcare:

- How does this fit with the flexibility my job demands?
- What are the back-up options when my child is unwell and excluded from childcare?
- What is the back-up option if my child's carer is unwell?
- What are the financial implications?
- Am I entitled to Working Tax credits to pay for part or all of childcare costs?
- Can I use Childcare vouchers with this form of childcare?
- When was the last OFSTED inspection and how was it rated

For further information on childcare and an idea of the current costs, please visit the Day Care Trust at www.daycaretrust.org.uk

Childcare and the emotional and practical side of leaving your baby are also discussed at NCT Early Days' courses.

Visit www.nct.org.uk for details.

Tips:

- **DO** ask about qualification and experience.
- **DO** follow up all references.
- **DO** look for a safe, clean and friendly environment with space to play outside.
- **DO** understand the procedure for milk storage, making up formula if relevant and feeding. You need to feel confident that your childcare provider will feed according to your baby's requirements.
- **DO** understand how communication is managed between parents and staff. Many childcare providers will have a diary in which they record feeding times and amounts, nappy changes and daily activities.
- **DO** read the OFSTED report and see the registration papers if relevant.
- **DO** ask about staff turnover, a happy setting will have a low staff turnover.
- **DO** visit the setting; a good sign is happy busy children who seem to be enjoying what they do.
- **DO** have a written contract.
- **DO** make contingency plans for sickness or emergencies.
- **DO** ask around to get the experiences of friends and family.
- **DON'T** compromise or feel pressured into one or other option. Follow your instincts.

How does this fit with my career?

Depending on your life and career goals, taking 6, 9 or 12 months maternity leave may or may not affect your career.

Vicky Hull has worked for her employer for 12 years. She manages a small team of people developing online training tools. She and her manager worked together to build a handover, keep in touch and back to work plan. Even though her health deteriorated towards the end of her pregnancy her employer supported her allowing her to work from home as and when she felt fit to do so. "This was so useful and incredibly supportive, I still felt my contribution was valued". When she returned to work she describes being overwhelmed. "The welcome back was amazing, they decorated my desk, found a photo of my daughter on Facebook and framed it. They even personalised a mug with my daughter's picture. It really was incredible, overwhelming! I felt so valued and wanted".

Vicky Hull, maternity returner at Happy

For example, if you are undertaking professional qualifications that take two years to complete, taking a year out will delay it. If you choose to return on a reduced number of hours, then this can also delay specific goals if you need to demonstrate effort or duration based achievements, e.g. required number of hours face-to-face with clients. It is worth noting that your working life can be nearly 50 years, and what may seem like a long delay now may not seem as much later on. In addition, many people have more than one career in their lifetime.

By understanding your values and goals, you can make informed choices about what it is you want out of your career and family life.

Once you have an idea of what you want to be doing in the next five to 10 years it is time to plan how you can achieve this.

The best way to start is to work out what and who can help and hinder you in achieving your goals, and after this, what you need to do to tip the balance in your favour. For example, consider who could help you maintain a good profile through maternity leave or if you want to work fewer hours, what backup arrangements do you need at home to accommodate job demands, such as early start times or working away from home.

To help build a career approach that will maintain your profile and career prospects, download the [career builder tool](#).

How to tell my employer

When the joy, excitement or shock of your pregnancy has started to settle, you will be wondering how and when to inform your employer and colleagues.

Whilst there's no guaranteed right way to announce your big news, there are a number of things you can do to increase a positive response and build a firm foundation for a smooth return to work after your maternity leave. When announcing your pregnancy you should aim to reassure your boss and colleagues of continued professionalism and commitment. It is worth bearing in mind that this will be a transition for your employer and colleagues as well as for you.

This section covers:

- When should I tell my employer I'm pregnant?
- Who should I tell first?
- How to prepare
- Concerns
- Telling my employer checklist

"Telling the boss was the hardest thing I've done in a long time. I needed to make sure he understood my commitment to work had not changed".

Lucy, account manager

When should I tell my employer I'm pregnant?

Legally, you do not need to tell your employer of your pregnancy and intention to take maternity leave until the 15th week before your baby is due. Many women announce their pregnancy at the end of the first trimester (about 12 weeks), as at this time the risk of miscarriage is greatly reduced and a growing bump may not be easy to hide.

There are various benefits to telling your employer sooner rather than later:

- The more planning and preparation you (and your employer) do before you leave the easier both of you will find it when you return.
- An employer's specific duty of care for a pregnant employee does not come into effect until informed of your pregnancy.
- If your pregnancy is difficult or you are experiencing issues with morning sickness or require time out of the normal work schedule for antenatal appointments, the right level of support may be difficult to

How to tell my employer

arrange if your employer does not know you are pregnant.

- Although you may work for a company that employs lots of women, many managers have no recent experience of managing a pregnant employee. An earlier announcement will enable all those involved to support you and the operational requirements of your organisation.

Regardless of when you announce your pregnancy verbally, if you wish to take maternity leave or claim SMP you need to notify your employer in writing of the date you want to start your leave and wish to claim SMP. You also need to provide proof of your pregnancy, which is usually in the form of a MAT B1 certificate signed by your midwife or doctor. The MAT B1 certificate is usually not available until after week 16 of your pregnancy.

Who should I tell first?

Generally, it's advisable to tell your boss first. Even the closest friend at work may make an unintentional comment that could reveal you are pregnant before you are ready for colleagues to know.

Telling your boss first will enable you to plan together how best to tell the other people you work with. It is absolutely fine to ask your boss to keep this information confidential until the time is right to tell other people. Depending on your role, your upcoming maternity leave may require

"Discovering I was pregnant was so exciting. It was really hard to keep it secret until after week 12. I wish I had thought how best to tell people because when I did, reactions were mixed".

Emma, teacher

a planned handover of relationships with customers, clients or suppliers in a way that does not impact the operation of the organisation.

If you anticipate a negative reaction from your boss it may be advisable to inform your employer earlier in confidence via HR.

How to prepare

The more you prepare, the easier it will be for you to plan what needs to be done. This also presents you as professional and committed.

- Talk to your GP or midwife about when it might be best to start maternity leave.
- Understand your organisation's practices and policies, and your legal rights (see the previous section of this guide for your basic rights)
- Anticipate your boss's reaction. This may be the first time your manager will have worked with a pregnant employee.

Concerns

Women who have worked hard to climb the corporate ladder may be concerned about getting less challenging projects, particularly if partnership is a career ambition. Organisations should understand the strong business case for employing women at all levels and work hard to build a culture that is inclusive.

Occasionally, announcing pregnancy can be met with a less than enthusiastic response. Whilst your boss may be genuinely happy for you, she or he may be concerned about meeting operational requirements and possible impact to the business, especially if this is the first time they have managed maternity. Being professional and prepared will enable you to reassure your boss of your commitment and increase your ability to make a smooth transition.

"We know that our people are our key strength. This is where we add value to our clients. In order to be able to punch our weight we need highly committed, diverse and experienced teams."

Sarah Churchman, Human Capital Director at PwC

"It's self evident. Having women in the team brings a different perspective and a positive dynamic. We are more innovative, more collaborative and more productive."

Jon Carlton, Director of Shared Services, National Grid

"Throughout my career I've experienced first hand the benefits of employing women at all levels. The positive impact on industrial relations, productivity, innovation and absenteeism is often immediate."

Andy Rushton, HR director at Minerals Technologies

How to tell my employer

Telling my employer checklist

- Know my goals and career aspirations
- Know my key achievements so I can demonstrate value
- Understand my legal rights
- Understand my organisation's practices and policies
- Know my important dates
 - > Baby's due date
 - > Dates of antenatal appointments
 - > Dates for maternity leave
- Assessed strength of relationship with boss and set up a suitable time to inform him/her (or HR) of pregnancy
- Anticipate boss's concerns and be prepared to talk about them, e.g. how pregnancy and maternity leave may affect my job
- Options for flexible working, how this will affect my job and career and be prepared to talk about high level plans
- Agree dates to create a handover plan, keep in touch plan, performance review and back to work plan

Tips:

- **DO** arrange a time that is low stress and coincides with a major achievement if you can.
- **DO** be prepared and professional.
- **DO** understand the impact that your pregnancy and maternity leave will have on how your role is done.
- **DO** keep a record of phone calls, emails and meetings etc. Whether things are going well or badly this will enable you and your employer to have a record of what has been discussed and agreed.
- **DO** get agreements in writing.
- **DO** be prepared to answer questions about maternity leave, antenatal appointments and possibly intentions to request flexible working.
- **DO** agree a date and time for the next meeting to discuss how to prepare for a smooth handover, keeping in touch and return to work.
- **DO** remember that this is a transition for your colleagues and boss as well as you. They will have to make adjustment to what they do or a new person joining the team to cover for you during your leave.

How should I tell other people at work?

Depending on the job you do there may be a number of other people you need to inform about your pregnancy and arrangements for your handover. This can include co-workers, suppliers, clients and customers. It pays to develop a strong network before you announce your pregnancy.

Your co-workers will probably be happy to share your joy; they may also have questions or concerns about changes to their own work as a result of your pregnancy and maternity leave. Other factors that may affect when and how you tell your colleagues is the culture of your organisation and the known or anticipated ambitions of your colleagues.

You may find that relationships with colleagues change after announcing your pregnancy and, in a small number of instances, you may find that you are deliberately or inadvertently excluded from key meeting or decisions. If this does happen, be assertive about wanting to be asked and involved, and reassure your colleagues of your continued commitment to the organisation, its goals and your role objectives. If this does happen, this may be discrimination and you should seek legal advice.

"A colleague told me that my boss is concerned to ask me as he thinks I just won't want to do it. Actually I do. I found that sometimes people make decisions for me without actually asking."

Karen Vert, business unit manager

How should I tell other people at work?

Tips:

- **DO** plan how to communicate your pregnancy to the different people you work with.
- **DO** anticipate concerns and be prepared to talk about handover plans. At all times reassure those you work with of your commitment to the organisation, its goals and your own role objectives.
- **DO** be assertive about unwanted attention; some women experience unsolicited petting of their growing bump, if you do and this makes you feel uncomfortable then let people know in a calm and professional manner. Continued unwanted attention focussed on your pregnancy could be considered harassment or discrimination. Be clear with your colleagues and others you work with if they make you feel uncomfortable.
- **DO** be prepared for comments about lack of commitment and changing values. Although this is becoming increasingly rare you may still experience some comments about your commitment. Be prepared with an answer that reassures people of your commitment to the organisation and its goals and your specific role objectives. Write it down and practice it so that you don't have to think about it if the situation arises.

"I found that being pregnant helped me develop relationships with some of my female colleagues that just didn't exist before."

Victoria Smith, HR manager at DHL

Avoiding the bumps

The more preparation and thought put into managing maternity leave the smoother the return to work will be.

In the previous section, we covered how to identify what it is you want out of your work and family life and the various options for achieving it. This section includes:

- Preparing a handover plan
- Performance review
- Preparing a back to work plan
- Preparing a keep in touch plan
- Pre-maternity leave checklist

Sarah Green started planning maternity leave as soon as she knew she was pregnant. She saved up her annual leave so that she could take four weeks of paid holiday prior to her maternity leave. "I thought about it – I figured I would probably get very large, very hot and very grumpy. I had seen loads of people trying to work up until the last possible minute. It never seems to work out very well, so I decided to save up all my annual leave to make sure that I could leave six weeks before my due date. It worked out really well, I felt really calm and prepared, and it was a good job as the baby was early!"

Sarah Green, finance clerk

"The most useful advice I got from a colleague was to be proactive, and it's true."

Sandra, administrator

"It became clear that nobody else really knew what was going on! So I took a proactive approach managing the maternity process like a project. I initiated the health and safety risk assessment and I also created a handover plan and a return to work plan."

Jane Black, night shift stock controller

Avoiding the bumps

Preparing a handover plan

Discuss with your boss the options for handing over responsibilities and when it is appropriate to do this. If you plan to return to work after OML then you have the right to return to the job you were doing before maternity leave. If you are returning after this date then you usually have the right to return to the same job, or under unusual circumstances to a similar role on the same terms and conditions. Your handover plan should reflect the temporary nature of your maternity cover.

“Identifying a good successor or good cover is part of doing your job well. I made sure that the person who took over from me was good at what they did. I wanted my manager to say “Yes there has been a smooth transition”. I also wanted my manager to recognise that we each brought different skills to the role, so I made sure that this was part of my performance review before I left.”

Caroline Gorski , account director at Sodexo

Common options for maternity cover are:

- Recruitment of a single person to cover maternity leave, this could be a transfer from another part of the organisation or recruitment of a temporary employee or contractor.
- Dispersal of responsibilities throughout the remaining team, involving a readjustment to other team members’ temporary roles and responsibilities.
- Postponement of activities (sometimes used for non-business critical project or if a short maternity leave is planned).

Agree a timescale with your boss for each element of your role. Capturing a detailed account of what your job involves now will also help you to handover responsibilities effectively ensuring minimum disruption. It will also enable you to identify and take back your responsibilities when you return.

Performance review

Both employers and mothers find it useful to do a performance review prior to going on maternity leave. This will provide a good baseline from which to return to work and also ensure that any performance related pay and benefits are received as appropriate.

Preparing a back to work plan

One way of managing a smooth return to work is to create a phased return that refreshes your skills, relationships and builds up confidence. By working with your boss you can agree how best to do this. Keep in touch (KIT) days can be used to create a phased start towards the end of maternity leave and accrued holidays can be used to artificially create part-time working after your official start back to work.

The back to work plan should also include a period of handover from your maternity cover. This will probably be a reversal of the handover that happened prior to maternity leave.

Jane Black used KIT days and annual leave to create a phased start. “I came back to work one day per week using my KIT days. My maternity cover was very laid back and basically let me get on with finding out what had changed and settle back in.”

Jane Black, night shift stock controller

Preparing a keep in touch plan

Employees that keep in touch and continue to nurture their relationship with their employer, boss and co-workers have more reasons to return and find it easier to return.

There are only two things that you are required to do legally to keep in touch with your employer whilst on maternity leave:

- Inform your employer of the birth if it comes before your maternity leave starts or the if you want to return to work within 6 months of the birth.
- If you plan to return to work before the end of your statutory entitlement of 52 weeks then you need to provide eight weeks formal notice to your employer.
- Anything else in terms of keeping in touch is up to you and your employer.

Discuss and agree with your boss how you want to keep in touch. This could be a phone call every month or it could be popping in to work to show off your new baby.

Whilst you are on maternity leave you are still an employee and your employer has a duty to keep you informed, just as any other employee, of things like organisational changes and changes to practices and policies.

Avoiding the bumps

As part of your keep in touch plan you can agree how you would like to be informed, e.g. by phone call, e-mail or letter. If your organisation is subject to a merger or acquisition or chooses to restructure and downsize whilst you are on maternity leave you have a right to be informed and consulted. For more information about what to do if you feel that you might be made redundant whilst on maternity leave please call the Working Families legal helpline on 0800 013 0313.

Pre-maternity leave checklist

- Ids and password written down in a secure place
- Payroll informed of start of maternity leave date
- Back to work plan agreed
- Formal and informal keep in touch plan agreed
- Performance review and career review completed
- Handover completed

Tips:

- **DO** assess the relationship you have with your boss prior to any discussions about maternity leave and flexible working.
- **DO** record all meetings and phone calls that discuss maternity leave and flexible working.
- **DO** manage you maternity as a work project.

Keeping in touch & getting ready to return to work

Your return to work may still seem a long way off, but starting to prepare for your return sooner will make it much easier.

If you are going back to work before you have had your 52 weeks' maternity leave, then you need to give your employer eight weeks notice. It's also worth thinking about flexible working early on too. Negotiation with your employer can take up to 14 weeks. Your employer will also appreciate it if they know what you are thinking of early on, to help them plan your return.

This section covers:

- Building up confidence
- Flexible working
- Rebalancing the workload at home
- Breastfeeding
- Return to work checklist

Building up confidence

The demands of the workplace are often very different from those of family life. When you spend most of your day nurturing and responding to the needs of a baby it can be very hard to imagine working as well. Whether returning to work cannot come soon enough or you feel that time has passed too quickly, it is very normal to have concerns about everything that's involved and your ability to do it all.

Now is a good time to review the career assessment and the back to work plan you prepared before you went on maternity leave. Do you still feel the same about your career and family? Are the timings still relevant? If you haven't already done a career assessment and prepared a back to work plan, review the first few chapters of this guide for tips on how to do this.

Remember that you are entitled to change your mind. You will not know exactly how you will feel as a parent until it happens – and even then it's not static. It may help to talk to other families about what worked for them, whether they took a career break, worked part time or full time. However, your feelings and situation will be unique to you. There are often ways to reduce outgoings, share childcare or to work at home that enable you to spend more time with your baby. Child tax credit can help with the cost of childcare.

The more you divide up your return to work into achievable tasks, the more confident



Keeping in touch & getting ready to return to work

you will become about achieving them. In addition, getting some of the fundamental things sorted out like childcare will further boost confidence. Consider the skills you have developed whilst on maternity leave, e.g. emotional intelligence, multi-tasking, ability to see the bigger picture as well as the operational detail.

Sometimes, a mother can feel frequently tearful, isolated or very distressed about going back to work. This could be triggered by something else happening in life or may be a symptom of postnatal depression. Postnatal depression (PND) affects about one in 10 mothers in the UK, and usually develops in the first four to six weeks after childbirth. However, in some cases it may take several months to develop. PND can be treated and your GP or health visitor is there to help you. You can find out more about PND by contacting the NCT.

"I didn't know if I would remember things. Actually it all came back very quickly. People expect you to pick up where you left off. It's not like that. It does take a little while to get back into things."

Jane Black, night shift stock controller

"I was very worried about being able to switch off my maternal concerns at work. Actually it's fine. I just get on with work and I enjoy it, then when I'm at home I get on with that!"

Morag Evans, manager

"It felt really odd going back to work, I was really nervous as I knew it would be completely different from being at home with Phoebe. But, after I got in a round of coffees, it was as if I had never been away."

Sarah Green, finance clerk

Flexible working

The term flexible working is used to describe any working pattern that is adapted to suit your needs. Listed below are the most common types of flexible working:

- Part time: working less than the normal hours per day or fewer days per week.
- Home working: working from home either ad hoc or on a regular basis.
- Compressed hours: working your agreed hours over fewer days, e.g. working 37 hours in four days.
- Flexi time: choosing when to work (there's usually a core period during which you have to work).
- Annualised hours: your hours are worked out over a year (often set shifts with you deciding when to work the other hours).
- Staggered hours: different starting, break and finishing times.
- Job sharing: sharing a job with someone else.

"I wanted to change my hours to be able to take my other children to school so I prepared a business case and worked out what hours would suit me and also not impact negatively on my colleagues. My manager supported my request and my new hours were agreed."

Emma Burr, back office clerk

The process for requesting and getting a formal agreement for flexible working can take up to 14 weeks and this needs to be in place before you return to work.

Any employee can request flexible working, however some employees have a statutory right in law to do so, and their employers have a statutory duty to consider this request. Currently, if you are an employee with 26 weeks continuous service with your employer (which can include your maternity leave) AND who has parental caring responsibility for a child who is 16 or under, or a disabled child 18 or under in receipt of Disability Living Allowance, then you have the right to request flexible working and your employer has a duty to consider it.

Put in a formal request for flexible working

Once you have assessed your role and your needs, you are ready to take things to the next step. Talk things through with your line manager as adjustments may be required elsewhere in your team. Having the support of your manager will make the process much easier.

If your organisation does not have an established process for requesting flexible working, use the standard request form from www.direct.gov.uk.

Keeping in touch & getting ready to return to work

Highlight the benefits of flexible working to the organisation, which include:

- Keeping skills and experience (return on investment).
- Boosting morale by giving people more choice and control over their hours.
- Keeping a successful team intact.
- Having staff you know and can trust to delegate to.
- Saving time and money recruiting and developing a replacement.
- Aligning work time with individual peak-productivity time.
- Keeping people onboard once they start a family or take on other caring responsibilities.
- Increasing diversity to reflect customer/client base.
- Strengthening the business by having a mixture of talent and leadership styles.
- Flexibility to cover a wider span of hours to meet 24/7 demand.
- Lowering stress and/or the impact of personal issues on productivity.
- Reduction in travel expenses, office space costs and impact on the environment.
- Improving employee wellbeing as a result of a good balance between work and home life. This can positively impact on absenteeism rates, discretionary effort, loyalty, motivation and morale.

Women may have other arguments they can use if an employer refuses a request to work flexibly. This is because women tend to have more childcare responsibilities than men so some requirements (like having to work full-time) may indirectly discriminate against them. Your employer must justify the requirements for full-time employment as genuinely necessary for the business.

This is called indirect sex discrimination. If you are using an indirect sex discrimination argument, you will have to show how you personally lose out because you can't work flexibly. This could be because you will have to leave your job, will have to spend a lot of money on childcare, or won't see so much of your children. For more advice, you can contact the Working Families helpline on 0800 013 0313.

Follow the flexible working request procedure

Once you've put in your formal request, your employer has to hold a meeting with you, and give you a written decision. They can only turn you down for certain business reasons. There is an appeal process if you don't agree, which is also arranged by your employer.

Use the [job analysis tool](#) to work out the impact of different flexible working options on your role.

Tips:

- **DO** work collaboratively with your boss to find a solution that suits you both.
- **DO** be flexible and open minded about the possible solutions.
- **DO** recognise that you are employed to enable your organisation to meet its objectives.
- **DO** think strategically about how flexible working will help you reach your life and career goals.

"I've had lots of managers say that a role cannot be done flexibly or part time. My view is that everything can be shared with proper planning in place."

Les Adams, senior manager at National Grid

Rebalancing the workload at home

Many mothers who return to work find that their confidence actually takes a turn for the better once they have achieved the balance between work and children.

Childcare and the emotional and practical side of leaving your baby are often discussed at NCT Early Days' courses. Mothers who choose nursery care often decide to settle the baby in before starting back at work, which allows them to relax a little on the first day.

Having a baby means more mess and with toys, tears and tantrums, you may find that cleaning up after your baby becomes one chore too many if you are working at the same time. Research has shown that one of the most prevalent feelings among young mums is the wish that dads would do some of the housework. Several studies have linked men sharing childcare responsibilities and overall relationship stability. If you both work, it can be difficult to make sure that all the jobs around the house get done, but be careful about falling into the triple bind of work, childcare and housework. Effective communication is key but remember, the house only needs to be baby clean, not laboratory clean.

Keeping in touch & getting ready to return to work

Below is a check list of the common things to discuss and agree with your partner:

Checklist

- Childcare drop off and pick up
- Preparation of day bag e.g. nappies, wipes, spare clothes, food, snacks
- Preparing packed lunches
- Primary carer responsibility
 - > who is contacted in case of emergency
 - > who takes time off work to care for a sick child
- Cleaning (split it down by room if that's easier)
- Cooking
- Washing up/dishwasher
- Shopping
- Gardening
- Managing household budgets

Breastfeeding

You can continue to breastfeed after you return to work. It's important that you know that under the law, you, your baby and your breastfeeding are protected under Health and Safety at Work legislation, which requires employers to ensure that a breastfeeding employee has suitable facilities to rest for either expressing milk or feeding her baby. You'll need to be organised and flexible, to know your options and it helps to have support in your workplace from your employer and your colleagues.

Employers should ensure that the employee has rest periods and access to a comfortable, private room to express milk, and access to a refrigerator to safely store the milk. The room cannot be the toilets. If your baby is in a workplace nursery, you should be able to breastfeed your baby there. You can continue breastfeeding for as long as you and your baby want – there is no restriction under the law.

Some women prefer to breastfeed at home and give formula milk during the day, or find it hard to express. If so, you will probably need to reduce feeds during the time when you would be at work prior to your return, so that you don't become too engorged and uncomfortable during the time you are at work. Talk to your health visitor or a breastfeeding counsellor for more details, or visit the [NCT website](#).

Provided breastfeeding is well established,

women usually find they can breastfeed fully at weekends/evenings and partially on their days at work, with the baby's carer giving expressed milk or formula.

If you are formula feeding you need to be confident that your childminder, carer or nursery are making up the formula safely and giving the right amount. See the NCT information sheet for further details.

However you feed, it is helpful if your child's carer lets you know how your baby has fed during the day, so that you are up to date with any changes. Whether you are expressing at work or breastfeeding, your employer needs to make sure there are no health and safety risks that could affect your health, or the health of your baby.

Employers must not refuse to allow you to return to work, or refuse you access to training, because you are breastfeeding, or refuse to accommodate breastfeeding – this would automatically be unlawful sex discrimination. It is worthwhile seeking legal advice if you feel your ability to continue breastfeeding after your return to work is affected in any way.

You need :

- a clean, warm, comfortable and private room with a lockable door
- a comfortable chair
- a clean place for you to leave your sterilising equipment and your pump if you are using one
- a clean fridge to store your milk

Having a breastfeeding policy can help give you some back-up, makes it easier for other women in the same situation, and helps you and your employer. Speak to your health and safety representative at work about this. Other useful support could come from an occupational health nurse, trade union, your union's women's officer or equal opportunities officer. You or your employer can get advice and support on this from the Equality and Human Rights Commission or the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

The NCT have a breastfeeding line, open seven days a week, 8am-10pm. You can talk to a qualified breastfeeding counsellor for information and support: **0300 330 0771**.

Keeping in touch & getting ready to return to work

Return to work checklist

Work

- Agreed return date with employer
- Agreed flexible working arrangements
- KIT days completed
- Access to buildings confirmed
- Access to systems tested
- Induction/handover plan agreed (e.g. key personnel are expecting you)
- Breastfeeding/expressing facilities available
- Breastfeeding policy in place

Childcare

- Childcare identified and contracts signed
- Back up plan agreed
- Settling in days completed
- Clothing, bottles, wipes, nappies
- Day bag

Home

- Rebalanced roles and responsibilities at home
- Agreed how to manage drop off and pick up (if appropriate)



Back at work

It is very normal to take a few weeks to get back up to speed. The demands of caring for a baby at home are often very different from the work environment, so allow yourself time to adjust and remind yourself of all the reasons you have chosen to come back to work.

"I expected myself to hit the ground running and it didn't take long to get back up to speed."

Victoria Smith, first time mother

As with all change there is an emotional and psychological adjustment. The first few days can be difficult. You may feel comfortable being back in a familiar environment while at other times it may feel like it will take ages to settle in again.

This is when all the preparation and planning will pay off. A back to work plan - agreed by your employer and including a planned handover period - will provide the framework to get back up to speed. You may find the plan needs to be readjusted because you are adapting quickly or not. It is OK to speed things up or down if that feels right to you.

If you built a strong network before you left and have kept in touch with people over your maternity leave, this will also pay dividends. You will find that you are welcomed back and can continue developing the relationships that will help you in your working life and career.

Remember that this is a transition period for your colleagues and boss as well. You may choose to work differently from when you left. It will take time for your colleagues and boss to realise the full implications of this.

Back at work

Tips:

- **DO** plan regular reviews with your line manager or boss. A weekly update with your boss during the first month is useful for reporting on what is working well and to raise issues. This also has the benefit of enabling you to appear professional and proactive. It will help your boss to realise that you are adding value from day one.
- **DO** agree a date for an objectives setting meeting in your first week back. A good time for this will be about two months after your return to work. Use this meeting to agree short-term objectives and also talk about your career plan. This will enable you to reassure your line manager of your commitment and professionalism.
- **DO** ask for help. It is very easy for those you work with to assume everything is OK if you don't say anything.
- **DO** review your life and career goals after you have been back for a couple of months.

Kate has recently returned to work and been promoted. Her biggest challenges are meetings that are often arranged and rearranged at short notice. This means that she needs to rearrange childcare at short notice. She also finds it a challenge to cope when her child is sick. However, within her immediate team there are very positive ways of working. "Most of us have young children and we work very closely together to support each other."

Kate Moben, second time mother and senior manager

The home front

The arrival of a baby changes your life in many ways. Women notice that things are changing for them during pregnancy when their thoughts and dreams become increasingly focused on the baby they are carrying. When the baby arrives, the hormonal changes going on in your body and the sheer hard work of caring for a young baby may make it seem like the outside world 'disappears' for a while.

No matter how much you love your baby there will be times when you miss the life you had before, when you could go out when you wanted to and generally 'do your own thing'. There's always a strange sense that you should be really happy now your baby is here and that everything should be rosy – but the first couple of months are a phenomenal rollercoaster, where a combination of intense emotions, hormones and sleep deprivation can give life a strange view.

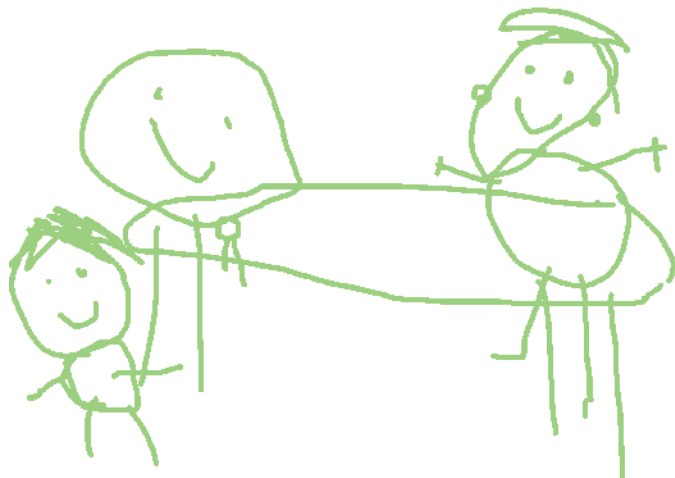
If you or your partner takes paternity leave, for a short time you'll be absorbed in the new baby, but then have to return to work. It can feel strange having a foot in two different worlds; the working world where you have to carry on functioning in the same way as you did before the baby was born, and this intense new life with your baby.

Babies are demanding, time consuming and wonderful and they change everything. Sometimes it may feel as though you are losing a lot, especially when you see friends and workmates less and also go out less, but you also gain in unexpected ways. For some, family can mean much more and they can find a new closeness with their own parents and wider family. Others may find that the family unit that consists of them, their partner and baby becomes the most important thing. And then there are the new 'baby' friends who are happy to talk for hours about births, nappies and feeding.

The home front

Effective support

Take steps to support yourself: whether you're one of the one in ten women in the UK who suffers postnatal depression or not, it makes sense to have a support network in place. NCT branches organise regular meet ups for parents that can provide support when you're on maternity leave and when you start back at work. Sometimes it is easiest to go to events with your baby that are within "pram range", and be realistic about how tired you are going to be and how much organisation trips further away may take. You'd be amazed how much sharing your experiences with people in a similar position can help.



If things go wrong

If things go wrong whilst you are on maternity leave or during your return to work, it's always useful to get some advice to make sure you know what your rights are.

With any problem with your employer, the earlier you can get advice the better. So do try and speak to someone before you take further action. Other people who may be able to help you are your union representative if you are in a union, your employee ombudsman if your employer operates this type of scheme, ACAS and your local Citizens Advice Bureau.

Stillbirth

There are a number of different situations which may arise, and these are outlined below. For more detailed information download the [Working Families fact sheet](#).

Under the law, if your baby is still born dead before the end of the 24th week of pregnancy, it is called a miscarriage. If your baby is born dead after the 24th week of pregnancy it is called a stillbirth.

Women who have miscarriages are not entitled to their maternity rights. Women who have stillbirths have all the rights they would have had if their baby had been born alive.

If your baby is born alive at any stage of the pregnancy, even if he or she dies an instant later, you are entitled to all your maternity rights. You can also claim Child Benefit and Tax Credits for your baby for up to eight weeks after your baby's death.

"20 minutes in she was asking me what my short and medium term objectives were, I hadn't even had a cup of tea! There was no discussion, she didn't listen to what I said and just put the objective on the IT system. I then had a very short handover from my maternity cover but even though it was technically handed over the colleague doing my cover didn't move out of my desk. I felt so undermined. I don't blame her. She didn't really have anywhere else to go."

Joanne Shillington, works in a high security unit on a day shift.

Myth buster: FAQs for new mums

If my employer knows I'm pregnant, I don't need to do anything – I can just go on maternity leave when I'm ready

Pregnancy is a medical condition, as with other medical conditions you are not obliged to tell your employer. However, if you wish to take maternity leave and claim statutory maternity pay or maternity allowance then you must provide written evidence of your pregnancy not less than 15 weeks before your expected due date. Evidence is usually in the form of a MAT B1 certificate from your doctor or midwife.

If I'm pregnant my employer cannot make me redundant

You are protected under the equalities legislation from discrimination, however, should a redundancy situation arise and your role ceases in the new organisation then you can be made redundant so long as the selection pool for redundancy has been fairly identified.

I have the right to work flexibly in the way which fits in with my chosen childcare arrangements

You have the right to request flexible working and your employer has a duty to consider it. Your employer may refuse your request if it will adversely impact organisational objectives. You can appeal this decision.

My employer can sack me if I take time off when my child is sick

You do have the right to take "reasonable"

time off in an emergency, including when your baby is ill – a common situation. Your employer cannot discipline you for taking it. You should make sure you tell your employer what is going on and try to make arrangements so you can come back to work as soon as possible. This time off does not need to be paid.

It's not worth claiming tax credits, they won't be worth much money

For most families, it is always worth claiming tax credits. Although you may not be entitled to a lot of money when your baby is born, you could be entitled to more later on, for instance when you go back to work and start paying for childcare. Tax credits are based on the previous tax year, so many families are due more money later when the low income of the year you've been on maternity leave is taken into account. If you haven't claimed immediately, get advice and remember that you can usually backdate your claim by up to three months.

My partner will be able to take two weeks of paid leave when the baby is born

Unfortunately, paternity leave and pay are much more complicated than this, and many partners aren't entitled to their normal pay. Your partner should check their employment contract to see what entitlements have been given by the employer. Self-employed people are not entitled to paternity leave. 15 weeks notice is required for the intention to take paternity leave.

Further resources and information

Charities

NCT

NCT helps over a million mums and dads each year through pregnancy, birth and early days of parenthood. It offers antenatal and postnatal courses, local support across 300 local branches and reliable evidence-based information to help all parents. NCT wants all parents to feel confident and informed about their maternity care.

www.nct.org.uk

Working Families

Working Families has extensive experience of advising working parents and employers about combining work and family. They offer free fact sheets which cover all aspects of pregnancy, leave, pay and working and also have a free phone legal helpline for parents who need advice.

www.workingfamilies.org.uk

The Fatherhood Institute

Parenting is often a partnership and if women are to be seen as equals at work, then men need to be seen as equals at home. The Fatherhood Institute provides practical support and guidance to expectant and existing fathers.

www.fatherhoodinstitute.org

The DayCare Trust

For advice and help in finding the right childcare. www.daycaretrust.org.uk

Gingerbread

An organisation that provides advice and help for single parents.

www.gingerbread.org.uk

Networks

Employee parent networks

Many larger employers facilitate employee networks such as parent networks or working women's groups. These often provide an invaluable source of peer support, practical advice and career guidance as well as possibly setting up mentoring relationships

Professional women networks

There are a number of national networks designed to support and develop women through various career and life phases, for example, Women in Science, Engineering and technology, Women in project management, Lipstick in Logistics, European Professional Women's network.

Mentors

There are a number of schemes that provide mentoring services, some specifically to women going through the transition to working parenthood. If you work for a larger employer then they may have an internal scheme or may be signed up for an external scheme such as "Coaching Squared".

Maternity coaches

There are a growing number of coaches specialising in supporting women through the transition to working mother. If you work for a larger organisation, they may have a contract with an existing maternity coach provider or a maternity coach can be hired privately.

Health professionals

Your GP and midwife.

National Childbirth Trust

Alexandra House
Oldham Terrace
London W3 6NH

Pregnancy and birth line: 0300 330 0772

Early days line: 0300 330 0773

Breastfeeding line: 0300 330 0771

Enquiries: 0300 33 00 770

Fax: 0844 243 6001

email: advice@nct.org.uk

Registered Charity No: 801395

Registered Company No: 2370573

Registered in England and Wales

Registered address: Alexandra House,
Oldham Terrace, Acton, London W3 6NH.

Working Families

1-3 Berry Street

London

EC1V 0AA

Tel: 020 7253 7243

Fax: 020 7253 6253

Freephone helpline for low income families:

0800 013 0313

email: advice@workingfamilies.org.uk

Registered Charity No: 1099808

Registered Company No: 4727690

Registered in England

Registered address:

1-3 Berry Street, London EC1V 0AA