BREASTFEEDING AND RETURNING TO WORK
by

Linda Harrell, Outpatient Lactation Consultant at the Hayward, Fremont, and Union City Kaiser Permanente Medical Centers and
Karen Franchino, Maternal and Child Health Education Supervisor also at the Hayward, Fremont, and Union City Kaiser Permanente Medical Centers

**Dr. Desai:** Welcome to the Kaiser Permanente Healthcast. I am your host Dr. Kavin Desai.

Welcome Linda and Karen.

Today we are going to be talking about a topic that is very relevant to a lot of moms who are trying to return to work after having a child and that is breastfeeding and returning to work. Linda, is it possible for a mom to continue breastfeeding once she has returned to work?

**Linda:** It’s absolutely possible and we encourage it as much as possible.

**Dr. Desai:** What are some of the things that a new mom can do to prepare to return to work?

**Linda/Karen:** Actually I love this question because I just returned to work a couple of months ago after maternity leave.

The first thing you need to do is talk to your employer and the sooner you do that, the better. You want to explain what you plan to do so you’re going to be coming back to work and pumping and what that’s going to involve. That could mean finding a private place to pump, maybe three times a day. So work with your employer to find a place to pump. This could be someone’s vacant office, it could be an already identified lactation room in the company, or it could be the office of someone who is taking a break.

Talk to your employer about your pumping schedule. Depending on how old your baby is, when you return to work, you may be pumping as many as three times a day and you may need fifteen or more minutes each time to pump.

**Dr. Desai:** What happens if your employer is not supportive of your special needs? What are the recourses or what can you do about that?
**Linda/Karen:** That’s a great question. Breastfeeding has benefits for the employer as well. It’s not just for the babies. Breastfed babies are healthier as we know but that means they are going to be sick less often which means their moms are going to miss fewer days of work so that’s a good thing to remind your employers about. Also you can remind your employer, if they don’t already know, about the California Lactation Accommodation Law. This requires that most employers provide the use of a room or private location, other than a bathroom, to express milk. So that means that you should have some place to pump milk in.

Then you need a reasonable amount of time to express milk for your baby. If possible a mom could try to schedule her pump times around her already scheduled break times. Then she doesn’t need to take extra time out to do that. But if she needs to, she can schedule extra breaks just to express milk. When that happens, the employer has to pay for that.

**Dr. Desai:** Does this apply to all employers, large and small, because obviously in a smaller office it is more difficult if you are the only person doing a certain job. How does the law apply in all situations?

**Linda/Karen:** The law may not apply to smaller businesses, those with fewer than 20 employees. But even in those cases, you still want to talk to your supervisor or your boss because they may be very supportive of it and want to make sure they have employees who are getting to work all the time. So just because the law doesn’t apply, doesn’t mean you shouldn’t try to work it out.

**Dr. Desai:** And they really should be as you know.

What kind of breast pump does a mother need?

**Linda/Karen:** A mom should try to get the very best pump she can afford to get. She should consider that over the course of time the baby is getting milk, she would save a lot of money over formula. So there is a cost savings involved. If she returns to work before about eight months, we encourage her to use a hospital grade pump because the milk is still sort of tenuous at that point. After that, she could buy something like a Parlors (?) or a Pump in Style. Any of those double electric pumps are wonderful. They are very portable. She can take them into work. She can use it in her car. They are battery operated. They are great.

**Dr. Desai:** What if somebody absolutely cannot afford a pump. I mean we really want to encourage breastfeeding. So what is somebody absolutely cannot afford it.

**Linda/Karen:** We are lucky there because “Wick” can and many times does supply them with a pump.

**Dr. Desai:** When should a mom start feeding her baby with a bottle then?

**Linda/Karen:** You know, everyone has a different opinion on this. Some people wait until they go back to work. Some baby like to start really early if they have had an experience with a baby in the past who won’t go back to a bottle. Babies are smart. It’s more
comfortable and fun to breastfeed than to bottle feed. Usually I recommend you wait at least two weeks and then pump out a little milk and have Dad get involved or grandma or someone like that.

Some babies will refuse a bottle because they know the breast is right under that shirt right next to them. Then you need to get someone experienced involved, either your provider, grandma, a neighbor, your sister, someone who has done it before.

**Dr. Desai:** Are there particular types of bottles and nipples that they should use when doing this?

**Linda/Karen:** There are. We have a list. The recommendations change all the time as the research comes. It’s hard to find a nipple that looks like mom’s nipple but something similar is what we recommend. Always stay away from the fast flow nipples because then the babies get flow confusion. They prefer something that they don’t have to work too hard for. A slow flow nipple is something we always recommend.

**Dr. Desai:** Again then, when should a mom start pumping?

**Linda/Karen:** I would say two to three weeks after delivery when breastfeeding is going great. That’s the time when you can pull out your pump and see how it works. Pump after the first feeding of the day. That is the feeding for which you are more awake. That’s likely the time when you will have the most extra milk.

Don’t be disappointed if the first time you pump all you get is steam. Try it again and then you’ll get drops. Then the following day, you’ll get a little bit more.

When mom is back at work, she should probably plan on pumping about every three hours, probably three or four times if she can manage it. If she has one of those carry along pump things, it has usually a cold spot for it or just in a little cooler or refrigerator at work.

**Dr. Desai:** How much milk is the baby going to need when the mom goes to work?

**Linda/Karen:** It depends when she goes back and how old the baby is. She should probably plan on one ounce per pound of baby. But I would always leave a little bit more because you never know what might happen. You might bet stuck in traffic. You might have to go to a meeting. The baby might be in a growth spurt and need a little bit more. And you’ll get used to it. After you’ve been doing this for a couple of days, you’ll know how much to leave.

**Dr. Desai:** You had mentioned that you can store in the refrigerator or freeze. What is the best way to store milk?

**Linda/Karen:** You actually can just leave it at room temperature if you’re going to use it in 8 hours. You can leave it in the refrigerator. The conservative number is three days and the other number is ten so let’s go in the middle and say about a week. In the freezer, about three months if it is in a side-by-side or if it’s attached to your refrigerator, six months.
Dr. Desai: What about thawing? Can you microwave the stuff?

Linda/Karen: Please do not do that. You can have hot spots burn the baby’s mouth. But it also does alter the composition of the breast milk. So not a good idea. You can thaw it at room temperature. You can put it in the refrigerator overnight. Then if you really want to heat it, just put it in a pan of warm water to heat it up slightly. But you know, baby really doesn’t need a super warm bottle.

Dr. Desai: Okay, let’s switch gears and talk about the baby a little bit. How do we prepare the baby for mom’s absence.

Linda/Karen: The baby’s life is going to be disrupted a little and mom needs to realize that, as is hers. The one thing that mommies complain the most to me about is they go back to work at four to six months, baby is just starting to sleep through the night. They’re feeling fabulous about working some, and then the baby starts waking up every one or two hours at night. I tell them don’t be upset, it a compliment, he misses you. But they always forget. I always get a call or an e-mail a week later saying what’s wrong with him, he is waking up all night.

Dr. Desai: What should the working mother do to prepare the childcare provider for the baby?

Linda/Karen: If this is your first baby, you’re going to be nervous about this, no matter what. But keep in mind that most child care providers have experience with breastfeeding moms and know what to do with this. Just have a discussion with them.

You want to keep in mind that you’re not going to be bringing a big bottle of milk for them because you are still establishing this relationship. It’s easier if you can bring the smaller amounts of milk, a few bottles of 2 ounces of milk so it’s less likely to be wasted. Work with your child care provider. She will be able to tell you how much you’re baby is taking and over the course of a few weeks, you’ll get to know how much you need to bring every day and what size bottles and containers and how much the baby is eating. So it is worrisome in general but not so much because of the breast feeding.

Dr. Desai: That is a lot of good information. What is moms have more questions? What is a good resource that they can go to?

Karen: One of the best consultants is Linda. She has the Breastfeeding Lactation Warm Line which is 510-784-2804. So if you call that number, Linda or whoever is staffing that phone that day will be able to call you within that day.

We also have Breastfeeding Classes. There is the Breastfeeding Basic Class and also the Breastfeeding and the Working Mom. If you didn’t have a chance to take these while you were pregnant. It’s not too late to take those. Those are actually open both Kaiser members
and nonmembers. You can bring your friend or your neighbor. You can call Health Education to register for that. The number in Hayward is 510-784-4531. The number in Fremont is 510-248-3455.

Health Education can also provide you with a lot of additional information. We have books that you can purchase or borrow. We have videos about breastfeeding, child care, all kinds of topics. So it is a great resource.

Another great resource, and this is one that I took advantage of. This is the Mommy and Me group. This is a group that Linda facilitates. It is a drop-in group. It’s Wednesday mornings from 10 to 12. Sure a lot of the women aren’t going to be talking about breastfeeding, but they are going to be talking about everything else under the sun as well, related to having a new baby. So it’s a really great resource for a new mom who may be feeling a little bit isolated.

**Dr. Desai:** Where is that again?

**Karen:** That’s in the Sleepy Hollow building in the Hayward facility. That’s were the Pediatrics Department is. It’s just on the second floor of that building in Conference Room M4. If you have question about that, if you forget any of this, if you call Health Education or if you call the Lactation Warm Line, we will steer you in the right place. There’s also the La Leche League meetings that we offer here in Hayward. There’s also other La Leche meetings elsewhere in the community. You can call us at Health Education and we can help you with that.

Another good place to look is your provider’s home page. If you are a Kaiser member of even if you are not member, just go to your physician’s home page and from there you can link into great breastfeeding information.

**Dr. Desai:** Well that is really terrific information on breastfeeding and the mom who is returning to work. If you had a last comment, what would it be?

**Karen:** The last comment I would want to make is that we’ve given you a lot of information and it still might be a little overwhelming...all these questions and all these things to work out. Just keep in mind it really is doable and if this is something you want to do, we encourage it and want to help you. So if you have any questions, call Linda, call Health Education, and we can help you out.

**Dr. Desai:** Linda, Karen, thank you for your time.

Once again we have come to the end of an information Kaiser Permanente Healthcast. Thanks you for joining us. If you have questions or comments, please e-mail us at Castmaster@KPHealthcast.org.

Meanwhile stay healthy and always be on the lookout for more ways to THRIVE.