

# Tips for parents returning to work after having a baby

**This is health**



# Introduction

Having a baby can bring many joys to your life. You'll also experience lots of changes, both mental and physical. Returning to work while you're going through all this may feel daunting, but there are some things you can try to make this transition easier.





# What challenges might affect my return to work?

Below are some of the potential challenges you may experience.

## **Post birth issues and physical changes.**

After pregnancy and birth, each person's recovery will be different. You might experience post birth issues that affect everyday activities. These could include pelvic girdle pain, incontinence, or lower back pain.

**Breastfeeding.** If you breastfeed you may experience pain, leaking and oversupply or low supply of milk. If you express milk in the office, you'll need to schedule out time and request access to a private place. You'll also need somewhere to safely store the milk.

**Postnatal mental health.** After having a baby you might develop a mental health condition. This could include postnatal depression, postnatal anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, psychosis or post-traumatic stress disorder. Even if your partner gave birth, as a new parent you can also develop postnatal depression or anxiety.

**Sleep deprivation.** Falling and staying asleep can be difficult for new parents. Chronic sleep deprivation can affect your stress levels, mood and focus.



# What can I do to make returning to work easier?

## Have a plan

It's a good idea to set aside time to plan your return. You could have discussions with your manager before taking your leave and before you return, and think about how they can best support you. If you'll need to express milk at work, a risk assessment will be done. This is to ensure there's no risk of contamination to the milk.

Before you return, research and set up any childcare you'll need. You can also plan out any changes you may need to make at home, such as sharing out household jobs.

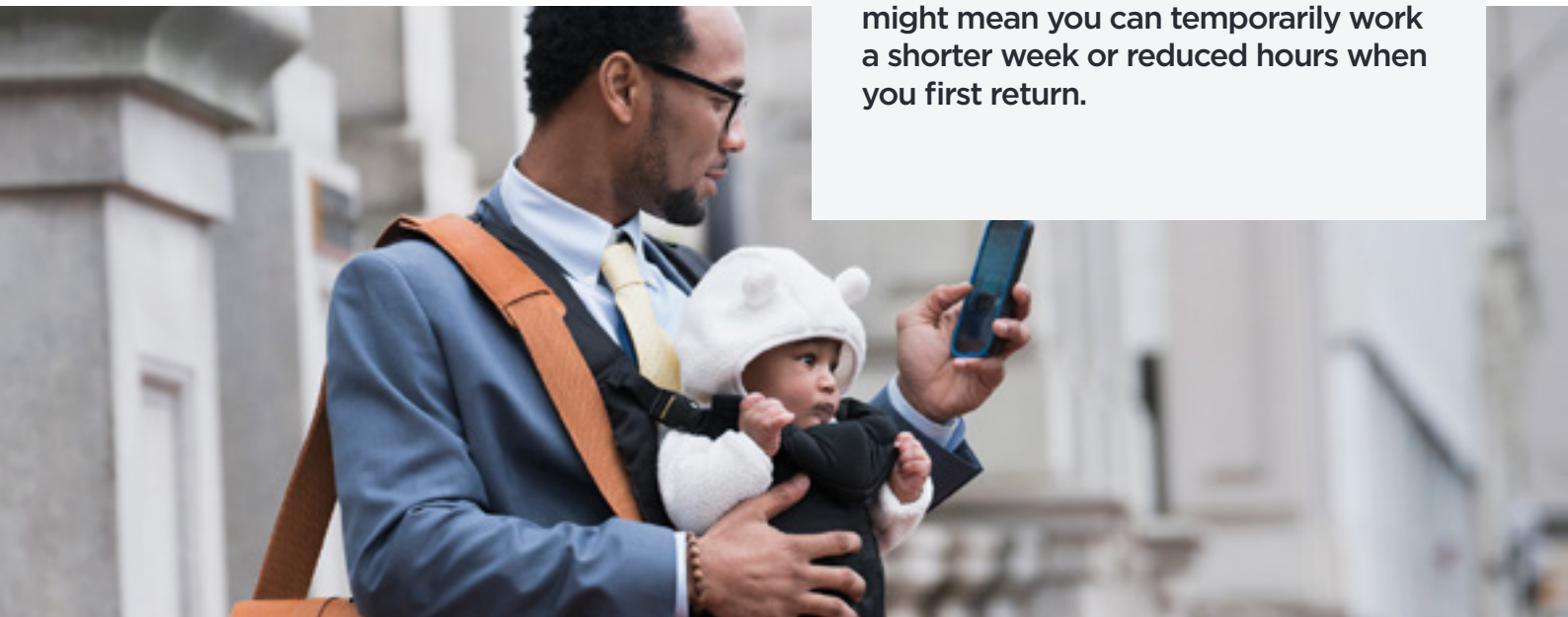
## Ask for flexibility

Flexible working is a way of working that suits your needs. This can help you to arrange your hours around childcare and gradually settle back into work. To support your return, your manager should inform you about the company's flexible working approach.

You can submit a request to change how you work, for example:

- **working from home**
- **hybrid working** – working in the office some days and at home some days
- **part-time** – working less than full-time hours
- **compressed hours** – working full-time hours over fewer working days
- **flexitime** – choosing start and finish times but keeping to core hours e.g., 10am to 4pm
- **annualised hours** – working a certain number of hours per year, rather than per week
- **staggered hours** – having different start, finish and break times from other employees
- **job share** – sharing a job with another employee and splitting the hours

You could request to use some of your annual leave entitlement to facilitate a phased return to your contracted hours. If agreed by your manager this might mean you can temporarily work a shorter week or reduced hours when you first return.



## Focus on your skills and strengths

Over one in three people returning to the workplace said they'd lost confidence in their own ability. To build your work confidence back up, it can help to remind yourself of your skills, strengths and achievements. Or identify any transferrable skills you've gained by caring for your baby. You could also work on learning new skills by doing a training course or apprenticeship if your company offers this.

It may also help to think about what you wish to achieve at work. Setting realistic and clear career goals could help you to keep focused and motivated.

## Look after yourself

After having a baby it's important to look after and be kind to yourself. Try to set aside some 'me time' to do something you enjoy, even if it's just five minutes. Things you can try to look after your wellbeing include:

- trying breathing exercises
- keeping physically active
- keeping a regular routine
- eating well and staying hydrated
- spending time with others
- spending time in nature
- practicing meditation or mindfulness

**Try to maintain a good work-life balance, and make sure you're taking regular breaks at work. If you can, try to stretch or go outside for a quick walk on your break.**

It's also a good idea to familiarise yourselves with any employee benefits that could support your health — whether physical, mental, social or financial.







## Ask for help

Having a baby can sometimes be overwhelming. You may have many responsibilities to deal with at once. So it's important to ask for help if you need it. This could be practical help such as asking someone to bring meals round, or picking your baby up from childcare.

If you're struggling with your mental health, try to talk to those you trust and ask your GP for advice. You can also find mental health services local to you on websites like [Hub of Hope](#).

If you feel able to, tell your manager that you're struggling at work. Or you may have a human resources or people team that you can speak to.

Having a baby can come with physical and mental challenges. And employers must provide any reasonable adjustments if you need them. Some employers may also offer an employee assistance programme or other resources to support you during this time.

## Stay connected

Taking the time to connect with others is important, whether remote or in person. Working with colleagues in the office or having meet-ups can help you to settle back into work.

It can also help to have regular check-ins with your manager. You could discuss workload, career development, and any worries you may have about your role. It may be hard for managers to tell how you're getting on, especially if you work remotely. So it's important to be open and honest with them if you can.

No matter how hard things are, you're never alone. Building a sense of community may help you to better cope with your challenges. There are support groups and communities you can join such as [Mind the Dad](#) and [Peanut](#). Your workplace might also have a parents' community that you can take part in.

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