Challenges Breastfeeding Mothers Face and Strategies that Work

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:
• Learn about simple strategies for breastfeeding discretely in public. Some strategies include wearing clothes that allow easy access to your breasts, using nursing cover, breastfeeding your baby in a sling, wearing a nursing bra, and choosing seating next to a wall or in a booth.

• Practice discretely breastfeeding in front of a mirror so you will be able to see what others would see and make adjustments to your techniques.

• Learn about how to prevent leaking while at work (e.g., regular milk expression, folding arms to discreetly put pressure over the breast if you feel the milk flow letting down, wearing nursing pads, and bringing along an extra sweater or jacket to cover up).

• Don’t feel intimidated to breastfeed in public! South Carolina law states that a woman may breastfeed in public in any location where the mother is allowed and that the act of breastfeeding is not considered indecent exposure (S.C. Code Ann. §63-5-40).
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 worksites are unsanitary and may not be conducive to expressing milk. In those situations, mothers should talk to their supervisors and representatives from the Human Resources department. USC policies and federal laws state that all mother’s be given private, sanitary space in which to express milk.

Strategies that work:
• Develop a personal breastfeeding plan for when you return to work that accounts for work hours, environmental factors, childcare options, and milk expression/feeding options. You can use the “My Breastfeeding and Working Plan” in the resource list on Healthy Carolina’s website.
• Consider creative options for expressing milk in privacy, preferably before you go out on maternity leave. Possibilities include a private office, a conference room, dressing room, etc.
• If you encounter any problems, don’t hesitate to approach a Human Resources representative or a supervisor about the need for a lactation room.

Nursing Mothers’ Lounges
Through Healthy Carolina’s Lactation Support Initiative, Nursing Mothers’ Lounges are available throughout campus to provide breastfeeding moms a secure, private space to express milk after returning to work. Visit our website to see a map of where lounges are located on campus.
To check out a lounge key, contact Healthy Carolina by email or phone or you can submit a key request on our website. You may keep the key and use the lounge for as long as needed.

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 your work schedule to and come up with appropriate milk expression times (approximately every three hours) that will work with your schedule. Discuss your plan with your supervisor and be sure to express what your need are as a breastfeeding mother. You can use the “My Breastfeeding and Working Plan” worksheet located in Healthy Carolina’s online resource list to help develop a plan.
• Find out where you can rent a high quality electric breast pump to efficiently remove milk and minimize pumping time. Talk to your insurance company about what types of pump rentals they will cover.
• Smokers are often provided breaks to support an unhealthy practice; taking your allotted leave time to express milk is a positive practice that helps both the you and your employer.
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:

- Learn about breastfeeding mothers’ groups in your community. New mothers derive confidence from talking with other mothers who have breastfed their babies. See the resource list on Healthy Carolina’s website for more information.

- Dads can help with breastfeeding too! Read “Tips for Dads” and “How Can Dad Help” located in the resource list on Healthy Carolina’s website.

- Attend one of Healthy Carolina’s Learn at Lunch Seminars which are held approximately four times every semester and cover a wide range of topics pertaining to breastfeeding and nutrition. You can also network with other USC mothers!

- If you are around people who are critical of your breastfeeding, have a prepared statement for dealing with criticism. Practice your responses with your partner or a supportive friend to help you feel more confident.

- There are many online resources, blogs, email listservs and discussion boards for breastfeeding mothers and for mothers expressing milk after returning to work. See the resource list on Healthy Carolina’s website for a brief list of some of these resources.

- The U.S. Office on Women’s Health hosts a national breastfeeding hotline staffed by trained breastfeeding peer counselors to provide support by phone. Counselors can answer common breastfeeding questions and help you determine if you need to see a doctor or lactation consultant. Help is available in Spanish and English and the hotline is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. If you call after hours and leave a message, a counselor will return your call the next business day. 800-994-9662

- Lack of support and misconceptions about breastfeeding within workplace creates challenges and can be discouraging for moms who intend to breastfeed after returning to work. If you are perceive a lack of support within your workplace from managers or supervisors, contact the head of your department or division for assistance. If that does not produce change, contact the Human Resources department at USC.

- If a lack of knowledge or myths about breastfeeding within your workplace are creating difficulties for you in setting up a flexible schedule or designating a private space to pump, consider sharing the informational materials in the resource list on Healthy Carolina's website about the benefits of breastfeeding or contact us for educational materials targeted towards supervisor
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:
• Find what techniques work for you to encourage the milk to “let down” (e.g., bringing a photo, blanket, article of clothing with the baby’s smell, soft music, or nipple stimulation before pumping).

• Learn some simple relaxation techniques to help minimize fatigue and relieve stress. Breastfeeding educational materials and books are available through Healthy Carolina’s Lending Library.

• Your stress could get worse if you don’t get enough sleep. It is hard to fight off illness when you sleep poorly. With enough sleep, it is easier to cope with challenges and stay healthy. Try to get seven to nine hours of sleep every night. If you can’t, try to sleep when the baby sleeps.

• Join a mother-to-mother support group in your community or you can start your own. See the resource list on Healthy Carolina’s website for more information.

• Attend one of Healthy Carolina’s Learn at Lunch Seminars which are held approximately four times per semester and cover a wide range of topics pertaining to breastfeeding and nutrition. You can also network with other USC mothers!

• Get help from a professional if you need it. A therapist can help you work through stress and find better ways to deal with problems. Therapy can be especially helpful for moms suffering from the “Baby Blues” or post-partum depression.

• Set limits - there are only so many hours in the day. Set limits with yourself and others and don’t be afraid to say no to requests for your time and energy.

• Talk to friends and family members who are good listeners or who have experience breastfeeding. Finding someone who will let you talk freely about your problems and feelings without judging you does a world of good. Friends will remind you that you’re not alone.

• Physical activity not only helps relieve your tense muscles but helps your mood too! If you are a new mother, ask your doctor when it is okay to start exercising.

Did You Know?
Breastfeeding helps mothers relax and handle stress better. Skin-to-skin contact with your baby has a soothing effect.
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:

• Take a class with a lactation consultant to learn more about how to manage expressing milk at work. Through Healthy Carolina’s Lactation Support Initiative, all USC mothers can take a class centered around breastfeeding after returning to work with a board certified lactation consultant for FREE. Contact Healthy Carolina for more information.

• Learn more about how the breast makes milk and how to get a good start with breastfeeding through appropriate positioning and attachment of the baby. Breastfeeding educational materials and books are available through Healthy Carolina’s Lending Library.

• Feed your baby 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.

• Learn where you can get help in your community. See the resource list on Healthy Carolina’s website for more information.

• Phase back to work gradually, if possible, to allow yourself to adjust to the changing needs of your body 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. For 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.

• Acquire a high quality electric breast pump when you 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.

Adapted from Department of Health and Human Services’ publications “Business Case for Breastfeeding: Outreach Marketing Guide” and “Your Guide to Breastfeeding.”

Healthy Carolina
www.sc.edu/HealthyCarolina
803.777.1650

www.facebook.com/HealthyCarolina
@MyHlthyCarolina