Supporting Breastfeeding Employees

Supporting breastfeeding in the workplace has benefits for breastfeeding mothers *and* their employers.

Supporting Breastfeeding Employees: Mutually Beneficial

- Lactation support programs in the workplace can raise employee morale and increase productivity.

- Providing support for breastfeeding employees also can reduce turnover rates by more than 25 percent.

- Breastfeeding employees and their infants are sick less often, resulting in lower medical costs, fewer health insurance claims, and fewer absences.

Laws passed by states and the federal government have recognized the importance of supporting breastfeeding in the workplace.

- National health care reform law requires employers to provide a private, non–bathroom space and reasonable unpaid break time to employees to breastfeed a child or express their milk for one year.

- Employers with fewer than 50 employees are encouraged, but not legally required, to provide the same amenities.

- Numerous states have legislation granting special workplace protections to breastfeeding women.

Supportive policies and management set the tone in the workplace and send the message to all employees that breastfeeding is valued. This helps breastfeeding employees to feel confident in their ability to continue breastfeeding while working.

Photo courtesy of Wake AHEC

Basic lactation support is not difficult.

There are many ways employers can accommodate breastfeeding employees. The basics of any program include **support, education, privacy for breastfeeding or milk expression, and flexible breaks.**

To foster workplace support for breastfeeding:

- Establish written breastfeeding support policies that are given to all employees, incorporated into new staff orientation, and included in management trainings.

- Promote flexible work hours and break schedules to allow for nursing or milk expression.

- Allow women to bring their nursing infants with them to work.

Employees value information that they receive through their worksite. Brochures, posters, classes, and other resources can help ease the transition back to work.

Breastfeeding education should include:

- Education about feeding options during pregnancy, especially the benefits of breastfeeding.

- Back to work basics, such as the company's parental leave and breastfeeding policies, how to express and store human milk, and the physical and emotional impact of returning to work.

- Lactation Consult available on site and/or community resource lists for off-site lactation support.

Privacy for breastfeeding or milk expression:

Working women need a clean and private space to breastfeed their babies or express their milk. Suitable spaces should, at minimum, provide privacy, a comfortable chair, and an electrical outlet.

Possible rooms include:

- A private office with a door.

- A lounge adjacent to a restroom.

- A temporary space created with portable partitions.

Flexible breaks and work hours:

Breastfeeding mothers need to express milk about every three hours, or 2-3 times during a typical work day. Milk expression takes about 15-20 minutes, plus time to go to and from the lactation room.

Possible work arrangements could include:

- Scheduling coverage so that the staff member can leave her class room or work area.

- Job-sharing so that two part time employees split the work of one full-time staff member.

- Allowing full-time employees to work all of their hours in four days rather than five.

The Department of Health and Human Services' Business Case for Breastfeeding is a comprehensive breastfeeding support program for business. Get more information and download a toolkit of resources at http://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/ government-in-action/business-case-for-breastfeeding/index.cfm/