



Breastfeeding at work

Facts for the employer

For the compatibility of family and career during the breastfeeding period, mutual understanding and adaptability of employers and employee is required. Breastfeeding or expressing breast milk works even better if at the workplace, it is widely accepted and an adapted infrastructure is available.

Swiss Paediatricians and the WHO recommend that during the first (four to) six months of life to breastfeed exclusively, then continue breastfeeding at the gradual introduction of complementary foods until the age of two years or beyond.

Breastfeeding has several health benefits for mother and child. **Breastfed children are sick less often, this leads to fewer absences of parents in the workplace.** It was clearly shown that

- the risk of infections of the lower respiratory tract in children less than one year are reduced by breastfeeding by over 70%,
- breastfed children have less ear infections and less gastrointestinal infections, and are later less likely to develop obesity and type 2 diabetes mellitus,
- the risk for mothers to developing breast cancer are reduced and she is back to her normal weight faster.

Some mothers breastfeed their child without problem in the presence of others, some prefer to breastfeeding on privacy, and still others prefer to pump their milk during the workday outside the home.

Regardless of the individual's choice: Working mothers should have the possibility to continue breastfeeding or pump breast milk. In Switzerland, there are several requirements by the law of labour:

- **Breastfeeding the child at work or pumping breast milk is considered as paid working time^{*)}**
 - at least 30 minutes up to a working time of 4 hours
 - at least 60 minutes with a working time over 4 hours
 - 90 minutes with a working time over 7 hours
- **The company must provide a suitable room with a comfortable chair. ^{**)}**
- **The time required may be neither forward nor rescheduled; it may not be withdrawn from other rest periods such as holidays. ^{***)}**

(Not subject to the labour law are public administrations and the agriculture sector - they have their own laws, which often contain identical or similar provisions in relation to breastfeeding. Management positions are also exempt from the provisions set out in the labour code^{****)}.)

^{*)} Art. 60, ArGV1

^{**)} Art. 34 ArGV3

^{***)} Art. 35a, Abs. 2 ArG



****) Art. 2 und 3 ArG

Desirable would be employers who are happy about the pregnancy of an employee and accept their desire to breastfeed the child without reservations, who offer a program for a smooth return to work and offer help to organize during the first year. This encourages the woman to face up to the challenging questions, to develop workable solutions and see the employer as a trustful partner, if new questions emerge.

The typical questions of a mother at the beginning are:

- Where can I breastfeed or to pump in the work place in peace?
- When can I leave my work place, if I want to nurse the baby at the day care place?
- Where can I cool the expressed milk?

To combine family and work is a great achievement. All participants in family and professional environment can contribute for a good solution.

For you, as an employer, family-friendly structures are worth the extra effort:

- You increase your attractiveness as an employer - a key success factor in view of the increasing demand for professionals.
- You retain qualified, skilled and well-integrated personnel easier and longer. Long-term employees are carriers of the knowhow and valuable support for the company.
- They lower the cost of recruitment. Companies that incorporate new employees are likely to see significant cost until the person can use their services fully and the necessary knowhow acquired for their specific task.
- They facilitate the mothers after maternity leave to return to the workplace and reduce the cost associated with long absences due to family. Because mothers know that, a later re-entry will be more difficult for them.
- They promote the loyalty of mothers towards the company.
- They improve the working environment and increase the motivation of employees.
- They reduce absenteeism and increase productivity.
- A relaxed family life is important for mothers and fathers, and affects the performance of the employees. Therefore, men also appreciate flexible working hours or part-time individual models.

Long-time employees go through different phases of life that have an impact on their careers, their availability and motivation. Especially for women starting a family is one of them, which is frequently and unnecessarily a trigger for leaving the company. Employers should not be indifferent to changes in employees if they want to keep well-integrated personnel. To support the reconciliation of work and family is a need of the hour especially in the light of increasing staff turnover and the shrinking skilled labour pools. For the parents the first year of their child is a very special situation. In this phase, mothers (and fathers) are particularly challenged.

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