



# Returning to Work After Baby

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by/par health *nexus* santé

# Making Difficult Choices

Returning to work after a maternity, parenting or adoption leave can be difficult. This booklet offers helpful tips and information to help make your transition back to working outside the home as smooth as possible.

The challenge of time constraints, finding and paying for childcare, and the separation from your child can be overwhelming at times. Your child may also be experiencing emotions as a result of the changes. However, this stage of life can also provide the opportunity for you to re-evaluate your career and personal life goals. It can also be an opportunity for your child to benefit from new social and learning environments.

## REMEMBER...

- ✓ Set priorities.
- ✓ Be ready to let go of some things until you are more settled.
- ✓ Spend time with your child when you can.



# Exploring Options

In some cases, the job you had before a maternity, parental or adoption leave may no longer be the best fit for you, your baby, and your family. If returning to your previous job does not feel right, consider your options to make your work enjoyable and manageable:

## Discuss your work schedule

- Think about your schedule, taking into consideration childcare logistics, travel time and unplanned time off (for example, time needed to tend to a sick child).
- Consider flexible hours, part-time work, working from home, job sharing and/or a gradual return to work.
- Talk to your employer about flexible work hours that fit with your family's needs and make it possible for you to fulfill your work responsibilities.
- If you have an irregular schedule, such as shift work, see how you can adjust it to keep your child's schedule as regular as possible.
- If possible, look at ways to reduce your travel time by moving, changing jobs or telecommuting (working from home, at least some days).

## Change jobs or consider new opportunities

- Seek help through community-based employment services that offer career counselling, resume help, interview preparation and access to computers, internet and fax machines.
- Go to websites that offer information about employment and education services. You can search the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities of Ontario website to find out about employment and education services at: [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/tcu/search.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/tcu/search.html).
- Use the Employment Ontario Network to receive information and referral services in a variety of languages by calling toll-free 1-800-387-5656 or visiting [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/tcu/etlanding.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/tcu/etlanding.html).
- Consider running a small business out of your home.



# Choosing Childcare Services

When you return to work, you will need to put your child in someone else's care. This can be difficult, especially at the beginning.

## It may be helpful to know that:

- It is normal for your child to prefer staying with you rather than going to childcare. Your role is to make the experience a positive one and to let your child know that you will come back.
- You need to have confidence in your childcare provider. Your child will feel good about going to childcare if you feel good about your decision. If you are acting concerned, your child may sense your anxiety and that will add to their insecurity.
- Childcare can play a positive role in your child's development. The quality of the care is the most important contributing factor.



What is quality childcare?  
Licensed childcare in Ontario is regulated by the Day Nurseries Act and may be based in a centre (daycare) or in a home. Informal (unlicensed) childcare arrangements can also be made through a friend, neighbour or relative. A license is not required if there are no more than five children under the age of ten, in addition to the caregiver's own children.

**Here are some important things to consider that will help you select the best childcare for your child’s social and emotional development:**

- The childcare providers have training in early childhood education or, at least, considerable experience in the supervision, development and care of young children.
- The childcare providers demonstrate patience and sensitivity and communicate with the children in a positive and consistent manner.
- The indoor space is safe, clean, stimulating and welcoming, is large enough and has a quiet place for naps.
- There is a large, safe, outdoor space for play.
- The children seem happy and interested in what they are doing.
- If a child misbehaves, the caregivers use positive disciplinary methods and have discussed these methods ahead of time with the parents.
- The guidelines for the educator-child ratios are respected.





- Rules or limits are reasonable for the different ages and abilities of the children.
- There are clear routines that include outside and indoor play activities.
- All the children's activities are supervised.

**Here are some additional considerations when choosing an informal home-based childcare provider (unlicensed):**

- The caregiver is capable of managing children of different ages.
- The caregiver has current first aid and CPR training.
- The caregiver can see the children while she is in the food preparation area.
- The television is minimally used during childcare hours.
- No smoking is permitted in the home. If the childcare provider is a person who smokes, find out how children are supervised when the caregiver smokes outside.
- You have an alternate system in place if the caregiver is ill.
- You are able to check the references provided.

It is advisable to prepare some interview questions prior to visiting potential childcare providers.

Whether your child is in licensed or unlicensed care, make sure you have a plan in place if your child gets sick.

**If possible, help your child gradually make the transition to childcare. Here are some suggestions on how to do that:**

- Visit parent-child drop-in centres such as Ontario Early Years Centres to help your child be around other children and adults.
- Visit the childcare centre together, for a short time.
- Leave your child at the childcare centre for a short time.
- Leave your child at the childcare centre for a longer time.



For more information about choosing and finding childcare services in Ontario, visit: [www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare).

The Canadian Childcare Federation offers some tips in their brochure on *Quality Learning and Early Child Care* at [www.cccf-fcsge.ca/pdf/ParentingEng.pdf](http://www.cccf-fcsge.ca/pdf/ParentingEng.pdf).

# Work and Breastfeeding

The World Health Organization recommends continued breastfeeding up to two years of age or beyond. You can continue to breastfeed when you go back to work. It just takes a little organization and preparation. You are less likely to be absent from work to tend to a sick baby because breastfeeding strengthens the baby's immune system. There are a number of options for mothers who wish to continue breastfeeding while working:

- Choose a childcare that is close to your work. Talk to your employer about a schedule that allows you to go to the childcare centre to breastfeed your baby.
- If you have private childcare, you can arrange for your provider to bring your baby to you at work for breastfeeding.
- You can pump breast milk at work. Your childcare provider can use your stored breast milk to feed your baby the next day. Consider buying or renting an electric pump that allows you to pump both breasts at once. You can also learn to manually express milk.
- If you are pumping or breastfeeding at work, talk to your employer about a schedule and an appropriate space to accommodate your needs. The space should be clean, comfortable, and private, with electrical outlets and options to refrigerate your milk.
- When you are with your baby, breastfeed on demand.
- For advice specific to your situation, contact your local public health unit and ask to speak to a Lactation Consultant or a Public Health Nurse. You can also visit [www.lllc.ca](http://www.lllc.ca) to find a La Leche League leader in your community. (See For More Information on the last page.)



## What are your rights?

Breastfeeding is a human right in Ontario. To learn more about your rights related to breastfeeding and work, see [www.ohrc.on.ca](http://www.ohrc.on.ca).



# Planning Your Time



When you return to work, there are additional tasks such as getting yourself ready for work, getting your child ready for childcare or school, packing your child's bag for the day, and dropping off and picking up your child. Think about a routine that suits your family. Think about how you can share the work and organize your time so you have more time together as a family.

## SIMPLE WAYS TO SAVE TIME:

- Limit the number of trips to the grocery store by planning at least one full week of meals.
- Plan simple work-day dinners, and, on your days off, prepare several meals at once that freeze well, such as stews and soups, casseroles, and pot pies.
- Use a slow-cooker which allows your meal to cook while you are at work.
- Be prepared for the next day. The night before, pack lunches, bags, empty the dishwasher and get things such as clothes ready.
- In the morning, shower, dress, exercise or have a quiet cup of coffee before your children wake up.
- Keep breakfasts simple yet nutritious. Eat Right Ontario has some suggestions at [www.eatrightontario.ca/en/viewdocument.aspx?id=85](http://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/viewdocument.aspx?id=85).
- If possible, consider hiring someone to do some of the tasks you used to do yourself such as cutting the grass, shovelling the snow or cleaning the house.
- Share household chores and parenting tasks with your partner, for example, taking your child to childcare or picking her up. If you don't have a partner, be realistic about what you can do, and proud of what you can accomplish on your own.
- Ask for help from your family, friends, and/or local community centre.
- Prioritize what needs to get done and identify the things that can wait.



**Household chores can be difficult to manage once you are back to work, whether you are alone or living with a partner. The following tips can help when negotiating chores with your partner:**

- Talk with your partner about sharing household chores. Determine together what household chores are absolutely necessary and which ones could be done less frequently.
- Take into consideration your preferences and divide tasks accordingly.
- Rotate or split up the less enjoyable chores.
- Make a schedule. Arrange to do the chores at times that are convenient for your family. For example, you can do the main cleaning on Saturday morning, or split it up, spreading the cleaning tasks out over the week. If you feel it is necessary, plan out a typical week, ensuring everyone's needs are met.
- Prioritize your chores. You might not get to everything. Do the important things first.



### **IF YOU HAVE OLDER CHILDREN:**

- Involve older children in simple household chores (emptying the garbage, clearing the table).
- Help your children feel independent by letting them do as much as they can themselves – getting dressed, brushing their hair or pouring themselves cereal.
- If your child attends after-school activities, spend that time doing errands or chores that take longer or are difficult when your child is with you (e.g., grocery shopping).

# Establishing a Routine

When you return to work, you might find that your schedule feels chaotic at first. A routine may help to bring some calm into your home. Children react well to structure and routine, as it gives them a sense of security, trust and promotes good behaviour. It is important that a routine be predictable, but also flexible when needed. The Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs suggests considering the following factors when planning a routine:

- Physical needs – Children are rested, active and well fed.
- Social needs – Children have the chance to socialize with other children.
- Intellectual needs – Children engage in activities that stimulate their understanding of the world.
- Emotional needs – Parents support and comfort their children.
- Stages of development – The routine is adapted to the age of all the children in your household.
- Individual differences – The routine acknowledges individual children's personalities.

## If this seems overwhelming, prioritize!

Routines can also help you complete daily tasks. For example, preparing the baby's food and diaper bag, and laying out the baby's clothes the night before can help ease a hectic morning routine.

Consider in advance how to adjust your routine to accommodate business trips, family illness, and children who are ill and can't attend childcare. Having a plan in advance will help when these events do happen.

Parents who work irregular shifts have an added challenge regarding routines. Even if your schedule is irregular, try to keep your child's schedule as regular as possible. Consider using some pictures or songs to help your child associate the variant of the routine that is happening each day.



# Taking Care of Your Child

Children can experience stress too. The switch from being at home with a parent to being in a childcare setting may be difficult for them. Here are some ways you can decrease this stress:

- Spend as much time as you can with your child. Take the time to cuddle, hug, read and sing, to help your child feel secure and loved.
- When you are with your child, make sure you listen to what she says and pay attention to her interests.
- Play together.
- Ask your child how he is doing and listen to his feelings, his thoughts and about what is important to him. Younger children can express themselves in other ways, such as cuddling and laughing.
- Find time for family activities that you both enjoy.
- Limit the number of activities your child is signed up for. If possible, sign up for activities that involve parents and children.
- Find childcare close to your work so you can spend more time with your child. Use the time travelling to and from childcare to talk with your child, sing a song or talk about what your child sees.

## Activities for you and your children

Ontario's Early Years Centres and other community organizations offer programs and activities that you can do with your children as well as information and support for parents. Many locations offer a variety of daytime, evening and weekend programs.

For more information and locations: [ontario.ca/earlyyears](https://ontario.ca/earlyyears)

## 211 Community Information Centres

In larger centres in Ontario, the phone number 211 will help you get community, social, health and other government services. There is no charge for this service. You can dial 211 on your phone to see if you will be linked to the service. The website [www.211ontario.ca](https://www.211ontario.ca) also offers the information service.

# Taking Care of Yourself

Having a new baby brings about physical, emotional and social changes that might affect you when you go back to work. It is normal to go through an adjustment period. It is important to be aware of how you are feeling and to take care of yourself if you aren't feeling well. This is key for any new parent – not just mothers who gave birth.

## Postpartum Mood Disorders

1 in 5 mothers will have a postpartum mood disorder. Symptoms can include not feeling like yourself, being sad and tearful, and feeling exhausted but not able to sleep. Some men also become depressed or anxious after the birth of their baby. For more information:



[www.beststart.org/resources/ppmd/ppmd\\_bro\\_eng\\_lr.pdf](http://www.beststart.org/resources/ppmd/ppmd_bro_eng_lr.pdf)



Building a good social network is important to your mental health and can also be of very practical value. Find simple ways to keep in touch with your friends, family and neighbours such as email, phone, walks together, etc.

Many workplaces offer an Employee Assistance Plan to help employees manage issues that could impact their work and personal lives. Issues may include mental health, substance abuse, chronic illnesses, providing care for an aging parent, financial or legal concerns, etc. Assistance is usually free and always confidential. Find out if your employer has such a plan and how to access it.

**There are a number of things you can do to take care of yourself, including:**

### Getting enough sleep

Getting enough sleep will help you manage your stress.

- Try to get 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night when possible.
- If your child wakes up at night, take turns with your partner in order to sleep as well as you can.
- Reduce your caffeine intake, especially in the latter part of the day.
- Take a nap on the weekends if you can.



### Using relaxation techniques

- Take a few minutes to stretch and relieve the tension.
- Practice relaxation breathing and meditation.

### Being physically active

Physical activity will give you the energy you need and will help you manage stress.

- Include your children in your activities.
- Make use of your work breaks to walk, bike or jog.
- Bike to work or walk part way if you can.
- Use available opportunities, such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator.



For ideas on how to be active with your young child, visit:

[www.haveaballtogether.ca](http://www.haveaballtogether.ca)

## Eating healthy foods

Eating well will provide your body the energy you need and help you stay healthy. It will also set a strong foundation for your child's eating habits.



For Busy Bodies and Eat Right Be Active, visit [www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Resources.aspx](http://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Resources.aspx)

For *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*, visit [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)

For the *Eat Right Ontario Meal Planner*, visit [www.eatrightontario.ca/en/menuplanner.aspx](http://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/menuplanner.aspx)

For *Eat Right Ontario Recipes*, visit [www.eatrightontario.ca/en/recipes.aspx](http://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/recipes.aspx)

## Taking time for yourself

- Try to do something for yourself a few times a week. This could be reading, going for a walk, or talking to a friend.
- At the end of the day, think of at least one positive thing that happened in your day.

## Taking time off

- Separate your family life from your work life when you can.
- Use all your vacation time.
- Stay home and recover if you are sick or injured, or if your child is sick.
- If you have a partner, spend time together to talk and do activities you both enjoy.



# Planning a Budget

Going back to work means a return to a regular pay cheque – but having a larger family can mean extra costs and a tighter budget. Money issues can cause stress and anxiety in families. Planning a family budget can help you spend less and save money.

For more information about how to plan a family budget see: [www.acc-vac.gc.ca/clients/sub.cfm?source=health/wellness/4](http://www.acc-vac.gc.ca/clients/sub.cfm?source=health/wellness/4).

A sample budget spreadsheet for families is available at: [www.vertex42.com/Files/family-budget-planner.xls](http://www.vertex42.com/Files/family-budget-planner.xls).

You may be eligible for financial help from the government, for example, a childcare subsidy. For more information, visit [www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/paying.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/paying.html).

The Government of Canada also has a number of links to services for families, including financial ones, at: [www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/lifeevents/family.shtml](http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/lifeevents/family.shtml).



## WAYS TO HELP CUT COSTS:

- Buy second hand clothing, household items, furniture and toys. For any furniture, toy or car seat, be sure that all the safety features are in good working order before you buy them. The age of the product is also very important, especially in the case of cribs and car seats. Information on a large number of children products, their features and proper installation is available at [www.safekidscanada.ca](http://www.safekidscanada.ca). Product safety information on a large number of household products is available at [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/index-eng.php).



- Make a budget for groceries and other items that your family needs for the week or month. Stick to your budget. Buy only what you absolutely need.
- Buy and use food that is in season.
- Use all the food in your refrigerator before purchasing more.
- Plan meals for the week so you use leftover food in the next day's menu.
- Borrow books from the library.
- Borrow toys from the Ontario Early Years Centre.
- Find out about free or low-cost childrens' activities and programs in your community.
- If possible, share childcare costs with friends and family. Look after your friend's children free of charge and ask them to look after your children in exchange.

## For More Information

- For more tips on work-life balance, visit the Canadian Mental Health Association at [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca).
- For suggestions on managing stress, physical activity and healthy eating go to [www.heartandstroke.on.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.on.ca).
- Parenting tip sheets from the Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs can be downloaded in fourteen languages from [www.welcomehere.ca](http://www.welcomehere.ca), under “Multilingual Parent Resource Sheets”.
- Contact the Ontario Human Rights Commission if you have questions about your rights at [www.ohrc.on.ca](http://www.ohrc.on.ca); (800) 387-9080.
- Talk to someone at work (employer, nurse, health and safety representative) if you have specific concerns about your family-life balance.
- You can talk to a professional at your local Ontario Early Years Centre and find out about other services available in your community for parents [ontario.ca/earlyyears](http://ontario.ca/earlyyears).
- Contact La Leche League of Canada for breastfeeding support at [www.lllc.ca](http://www.lllc.ca); (800) 665-4324.
- Speak to with a Public Health Nurse for information about your health and that of your child. To find the Public Health Unit in your area, call Service Ontario at 1-800-267-8097.

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