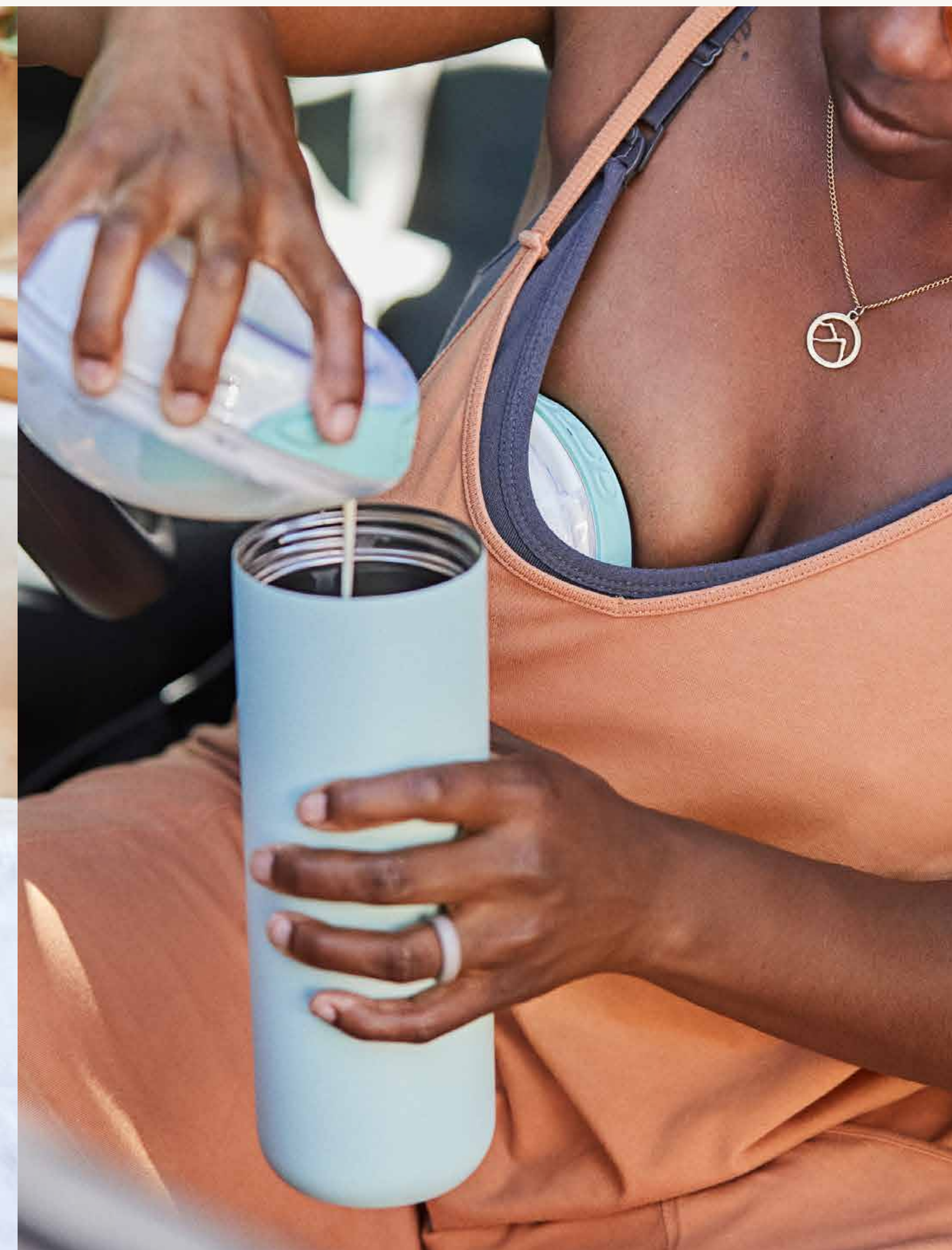
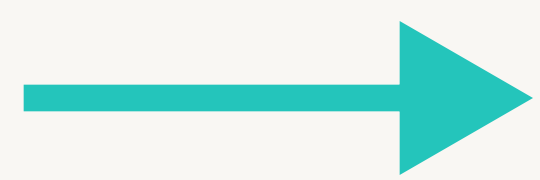


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The Ultimate Guide to Returning to Work and Pumping Away From Baby

How to prep yourself ahead of the big day, pack your pumping bag, and make sure that you know your workplace rights.



Whether you're returning to work or just starting to carve out more time for yourself, pumping away from baby requires a lot of prep.

The transition isn't without its challenges (and all the feels), so it's important to have a plan. In this guide, we're going through everything from how to prep, essentials you'll need for your pump bag, plus an overview of your rights as a pumping mom at work.

Part I: The Prep

How to wrap your head around the transition and settle into your new routine.

Expect (and accept!) emotions

No matter what your parenting (and feeding) journey has looked like so far, returning to work will likely be accompanied by lots of emotions. The good news: resources exist to support you as you navigate the transition.

Practice your new routine in advance

A little prep can go a long way — whether that means giving your commute a trial run, organizing your frozen breast milk, or packing your baby's diaper bag to make sure that they'll be ready for their first day at daycare or with a babysitter.

Your bag packing cheat sheet:

Baby's bag

1. Formula, if you're not breastfeeding or combo feeding
2. Bottles and nipples
3. Diapers, wipes, and diaper cream
4. Sheets or blankets for nap time (if they're off to daycare)
5. Prepped snacks for your childcare provider
6. Spare clothes
7. Cold and hot weather gear as needed (gloves, hat, sunscreen)
8. Pacifiers (and extras!)
9. Bibs

Your bag

1. Breast pump and accessories if you're pumping, with spares in case you lose a part
2. Storage bags for breast milk
3. A portable breast milk cooler that keeps your milk at a safe temperature (or an insulated bag and ice pack for storing breast milk if you don't have a cooler)
4. A spare shirt in case of leaks
5. A water bottle
6. A phone charger (you'll likely be on your phone a lot while you're pumping!)

TOP TIP

Consider a soft transition if it's available to you

A suggestion from the team (and our friends) at Mother Honestly: see if your company offers a phase-back program, which allows parents to work part-time schedules when they first return from parental leave. Even if your company doesn't offer a formal program, you might be able to work out an unofficial plan with your manager. If a part-time return isn't possible, ask to start on a Thursday, rather than a Monday. Two days away from your little one will feel less abrupt than five! (You can also use those first few days of the week to help your baby get acclimated to their new child care situation.)

Part II: The Pumps

When to start pumping and what to keep in mind as you establish and maintain your milk supply.

Do your research

Regardless of your lifestyle and your specific workplace demands, a hands-free, double-electric breast pump will give you the freedom you need to pump no matter where your work day takes you. Moms who work in fields like education, healthcare, emergency response, or military may need a pump that offers 360° of leak proof mobility, while others will prioritize a pump that's low profile, high comfort, and high capacity.

Start pumping (if you haven't already)

If you've been exclusively breastfeeding, we recommend starting at least two weeks before you head back to work. Start with 7 to 14 sessions per week so you can start building a stash and get comfortable with your pump. (Babies under 6 months old will usually need ~1 oz per hour while you're apart; babies over 6 months old may need a bit more, but it depends on their intake of solids!)

Here what's to do before your first day back:

- On Sunday evening: Defrost 10 ounces and prepare several bottles.
- On Monday: Pump at work when you would normally breastfeed (ideally every three hours). Monday's pumped milk will feed your baby on Tuesday, Tuesday's will feed your baby on Wednesday, and so on.
- On Friday: Freeze the milk pumped that day, breastfeed all weekend, and defrost your oldest milk on Sunday night for Monday. This schedule provides your baby with fresh milk every day except Monday.

TOP TIP

A suggestion from Willow's Customer Care team and Sizing Specialists:

A well-fitting flange can increase both comfort and output! Measure both nipples before you purchase your pumps, and then measure them again throughout your pumping journey, including any time you notice discomfort or a change in output. No two nipples are alike and your size may change during your feeding journey as you establish and regulate supply. Willow offers a measuring service to help ensure you have the right fit for your pumps.

Part III: The Essentials

Essentials for pumping on the go, keeping your breast milk safe, introducing baby to bottle, and more.

Transportation and mobility

Once you have a hands-free breast pump, you'll want a durable case or bag to carry it in, plus a portable breast milk cooler that keeps multiple pumping sessions' worth of milk at a safe temperature while you're at work. Alternatively, you can pump into storage bottles or bags, and carry them in an insulated cooler with ice packs.

TOP TIP

Gel ice packs + milk contacting parts

Look for a cooler with a built-in gel ice pack — they are TSA compliant with or without the presence of breast milk. Ideally, you'll also want a cooler that keeps the ice pack separate from your milk, which reduces the risk of potential contamination and makes the cooler easier to clean.

Sanitizing and storage

Pumping on the go calls for cleaning on the go. Ideally you have access to soap and a sink, but cleaning spray and wipes are the second best option. Look for products that are quick-drying, fragrance-free, and made with all-natural ingredients — after all, these parts will touch your milk!

Comfort and output

Three ways to set a strong pumping foundation? A snug but stretchy bra (a must for strong suction!), lactation teas filled with organic milk-supporting herbs, and spray that's designed to moisturize and soothe skin so that you're not pumping through pain.

Bottles

Certain bottles make it easier for babies to transition from the breast — because nobody has time for a bottle strike while they're getting ready to return to work. Look for slow-flow nipples that reduce nipple confusion by mimicking natural nursing rhythms and prevent gassiness and discomfort.

Part IV: The Protections

What to know about the PUMP Act and your rights at the office (and beyond).

The PUMP Act, passed in December of 2022, has gone into effect. It's the first time that legislation supporting mothers' feeding journeys has made its way through Congress since 2010 —and it's a major moment for working moms.

What is included in the Pump Act?

- **Break time:** Employees must be provided with sufficient break time to pump for up to a year after childbirth.
- **Private space:** Employees must be provided with "a place, other than a bathroom, that is shielded from view and free from intrusion from coworkers and the public" to express breast milk. The space must have a lock or sign on the door to establish privacy.
- **Functional space:** Employees must have a place to sit while pumping and a flat surface on which to place their pump.
- **Compensation:** While pumping, employees must either be completely relieved of work duties, or paid for their break time.
- **Access to remedies:** Employees have the right to financial compensation in the event that their employer violates the law.

The pumping at work checklist

Everything in the below list has been established as mandatory by the PUMP Act. If your employer isn't complying with these laws, you have the right to receive financial compensation and other potential remedies.

- A space that has been designated for pumping (a bathroom doesn't count!)
- Comfortable chairs and bench/desk at the appropriate height
- A door that locks
- An "occupied" sign on the door
- A flat surface for pumping equipment
- A sink with a drying rack and dish soap
- A refrigerator for safely storing milk
- Cubbies, cabinets, or shelves to store items
- An electrical outlet for plugging in a breast pump near each station (although you won't need it with a wearable pump like Willow 3.0 or Willow Go)
- A wastebasket and sanitizer for surfaces and hands
- Routine daily maintenance so the space stays clean
- Good lighting and ventilation

Part V: The Schedules

How to schedule pumping into your workday — and strategies for making the transition as seamless as possible.

Your pumping schedule will depend on a lot — your let-down periods, the amount of milk you pump during a single session, whether you work in or out of the house, how much milk you can store, and more. Plus, external factors (like your commute time and the sort of work you do) will play a role!

Sticking to a schedule is key, since it will allow you to maintain the supply that you've established (whether you've been exclusively pumping, pumping and nursing, or combo feeding).

Below are some options that take lots of different scenarios into account.

Pumping at work schedules

5 AM pump (store for day)
 6:30 AM breastfeed
 8–9 AM commute to work
 9 AM pump at work
 12 PM pump at lunch
 3 PM pump during break
 5–6 PM commute home
 6 PM breastfeed
 8:30 PM bedtime breastfeed
 10:30 PM pump (store for next day)

HOUR COMMUTE

5 AM breastfeed
 7 AM pump (store for day)
 8:30–9 AM commute to work
 10 AM pump at work
 1 PM pump at work
 4 PM pump at work
 5–5:30 PM commute home
 5:30 PM breastfeed
 8 PM bedtime breastfeed
 10 PM pump (store for next day)

30 MIN COMMUTE

5:30 AM breastfeed
 7 AM breastfeed
 8:30–9 AM commute to work
 9 AM pump at work
 12 PM breastfeed
 3 PM pump during break
 5–5:30 PM commute home
 5:30 PM breastfeed
 8 PM bedtime breastfeed
 10 PM pump (store for next day)

W/ LUNCH VISIT

5 AM breastfeed
 7 AM pump
 8:30–9 AM commute to work
 9:30 AM pump at work
 12 PM commute home
 12:30 PM breastfeed
 3:30 PM breastfeed
 5:30 PM pump
 8 PM bedtime breastfeed
 10 PM pump (store for next day)

WFH/HYBRID

The next phase of your feeding journey starts with Willow.

We're a team obsessed with rewriting the narrative around pumping. Since designing the first fully wearable pump in 2017, we've continued to create products and services that help moms reach their feeding goals on their terms.

Find pumps and pumping essentials, plus expert-backed content on all things returning to work and pumping away from baby, at onewillow.com and onewillow.com/blog.

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