breastfeeding Today

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Dear Readers...

New Executive Director Joins La Leche League International

I Love My Job but Hate Leaving My Kids

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Learning to Trust My Body’s Birth & Breastfeeding Powers

A Good Reason to Party! World Breastfeeding Week—August Celebrations Across the Globe

Black Breastfeeding Week Celebrations Highlight the Need for Change

Five Steps to an Easier Return to Employment or Education

interested in contributing an article, photograph or artwork to an upcoming issue of Breastfeeding Today? We’d love to hear from you! Email us at editorbt@llli.org to request our contributor guidelines.

ON THE COVER

Special thanks to artist Tanya Klochkov of Toronto, Canada, for her lovely watercolor image—part of her collection “African-American Parents: Set of 5 Posters with Affirmations: Diverse Families Wall Art.” To reach Tanya, email artbytanyak@gmail.com.

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Dear Readers,

As I sit down to write to you from this little corner of my apartment kitchen here in Oregon, USA, and reflect on the hundreds of WhatsApp messages exchanged over the past few months with my counterpart, Associate Editor Valentina Attanasio, across the globe in Italy, I am so humbled. To think that a whole world of breastfeeding families and advocates are reading this makes me a tad nervous, but so grateful at the same time!

Looking back
More than a decade ago, my now teenage daughters were babies, and I had a growing pile of La Leche League print magazines in my living room. The inspiring stories from parents who contributed to the magazine buoyed me on when my babies were cranky from teething and their mama, exhausted from lack of sleep. As I flipped through the pages I was reminded: I can overcome just about anything for the love of my children.

Then in 2011, a partially weaned pile of New Beginnings and Breastfeeding Today magazines accompanied me from Missouri to Oregon aboard the back of a moving truck. A feeling of sadness mixed with excitement over the unknown washed over me. On one hand, I was saying goodbye to a house and mourning a troubled relationship; but on the other, I would say hello to grandparents in my new town who would share proud smiles during my girls' school performances. And an established La Leche League group would be there to welcome me. By then I was an accredited La Leche League Leader and had been a freelance writer and editor for other magazines. I remember chuckling to myself as I wedged the magazine box into the truck, "Maybe one day I will play a key role in a La Leche League publication. Then all this magazine hoarding will prove valuable 'research.'"

Looking ahead
Funny thing, it has! As I click through the digital files of contributor stories for this Breastfeeding Today relaunch issue, I am reminded of what led me to fall in love with La Leche League magazines in the first place: the resounding themes of determination to overcome feeding obstacles and solidarity in knowing we are not alone. That's what makes La Leche League, well, La Leche League!

In this issue, we will celebrate working mothers who have helped shape breastfeeding and work laws across the globe, and caused employers to change their thinking, too. We’ll also stand in unison with August World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) and Black Breastfeeding Week (BBW) advocates in many countries, and hear about their exciting activities. (Not to worry Canada, Italy, Switzerland, Sweden, Germany, Austria, Belgium and France—your WBW October events will be featured in our November/December issue!)

Whether you work outside the home or not, there is one thing we likely all can agree on: every breastfeeding parent deserves the right to breastfeed, privately pump or hand express while at work to ensure baby receives human milk. And whether you celebrate World Breastfeeding Week in August or October—or have perhaps never heard of WBW before—drawing attention to the right to breastfeed is how we can change the tide at home and abroad. My hope is that my children and yours will one day live in a world where breastfeeding is seen as the norm in every country.

In closing, I want to say a special word of thanks to Valentina, for her unending support and encouragement over these past months. Also, to our faithful Breastfeeding Today Editorial Review Board members (at left), who have committed to helping us ensure the magazine is factually accurate and in top shape for all you readers.

Grateful for you all,

Karen

Karen Williamson
Managing Editor

Please note: The views, thoughts and opinions expressed in Breastfeeding Today belong to each author, and are not necessarily those of La Leche League International.
NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JOINS LLLI

We are pleased to announce that Zion Tankard has joined La Leche League International (LLLI) on 3 September as Executive Director. Zion comes to us with an educational background including a Bachelor of Science in Family and Child Development and a Master’s in Business Administration from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, USA. She is also pursuing her Doctorate in Education with a focus on Women’s History.

Originally from Los Angeles, California, USA, Zion has spent the last seven years working in women’s advocacy with the Durham County Women’s Commission in Durham County, North Carolina, USA. As Chair of this Commission, she was an integral part of a resolution for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), an international mechanism that outlines women’s fundamental human rights. Thus, Durham became the first county in the Southeast region of the United States, and the first place in North Carolina, to pass such a resolution, whose significance was recognized by the United Nations.

In 2018, Zion received special recognition from the News & Observer, an American regional newspaper, as “Tar Heel of the Week” (Tar Heel is the nickname for North Carolina), acknowledging the lasting and significant contribution of her work for the women and communities in her state.

Zion is married with four children and resides in Durham, North Carolina.

She looks forward to collaborating with LLLI stakeholders, continuing the important work of promoting breastfeeding, supporting our volunteer Leaders, families, and the healthy development of babies worldwide. Zion shares, “I am excited to have the opportunity to serve LLLI and new people, and learn how to serve you all.”

A warm note of appreciation to Lee Bryan Claassen for her years as Executive Director, for her professional expertise in helping our organization, and for her wise guidance and advice. We are fortunate that Lee is available to help Zion begin her new role with La Leche League.

Please join us in giving a welcome to our new Executive Director!
Just another Saturday morning. The sun rose on a golden dawn. The birds wouldn’t quiet, and my sweet 7 month old’s teeth had kept him up all night. My day “off work.”

His little whimper pulled me out of bed. My husband twitched but I knew there was no way his eyes could possibly open for another hour or two.

I stumbled into the baby’s room. Tears glistened on his rosy cheeks, but the second he saw me he erupted with happy coos.

“You’re lucky I’m a morning person.” I carried him out of his crib and got him changed.

He demanded cuddles, clinging to me with a warm embrace as soon as I picked him up again. He patted my back as if to say, “Sorry Mom, my mouth just really hurt.”

I nuzzled him to me and sat in the rocking chair to read to him while he sucked. The relaxing sensation of feeding him made everything worth it. I work outside the home. So, when the baby couldn’t sleep, I wanted to feed and cuddle him while I could.

Struggling with mom guilt

The feelings of guilt are that much stronger because I had been a stay-at-home mom for his two older sisters. I still need to nurture my babies. No matter what roles life pushes me into, I refuse to compromise my maternal bonds. Raising children while working a full-time job is demanding and heartbreaking at times, but balance is possible.
My first two breastfed baby love stories

Nothing will ever convince me that raising children is anything other than a full-time job. Breastfeeding alone can take up so much time in the early months that it should be considered a professional sport! My children did get a few bottles on occasion, but I filled those with fresh-squeezed human milk. I knew that what I fed them would affect their bodies for the rest of their lives.

My eldest had an appetite like a horse. She developed perfect rolls and dimples all over her little body.

"I knew it was irrational, but every time she turned away from my breast, I felt like she was rejecting me, not my milk."

Her sister was her polar opposite. She had a rough vaginal delivery that left her with a broken collar bone and a relentless case of thrush. She struggled to get comfortable and rarely wanted to eat. Her stomach couldn’t handle much. I knew it was irrational, but every time she turned away from my breast, I felt like she was rejecting me, not my milk.

Getting through that proved how dedicated I could be. I did anything I could to get her to eat. I even pretended to nurse myself at times—a practice that is not only as awkward as it sounds but will get you squirted in the eye! It made her laugh and that was all that mattered. The laughter opened her mouth enough to slip a nipple in and get her started.

She grew healthier and is now a strong little girl. She and her sister love my stories. They encouraged my writing more than anyone else over the years.

From stay-at-home mom to career mom

When my eldest was 5 and my second 3 years old, I landed a job offer to write full-time. The schedule offered flexibility and a standard Monday through Friday day shift with vacation time. The thought of leaving my children to go back to work scared me. It was too soon, but I couldn’t turn down the opportunity.

I discussed it with my kids. They expressed their fears and hopes, but my eldest still encouraged me on. “Maybe you’ll be a bestselling author!” she beamed.”

Maybe.” I smiled. “But that takes time.”

We accepted the changes. They were no longer nursing, needed me less and I loved writing.

Negotiating work-at-home privileges

Then I had my youngest child, a son. This baby came out smiling. He had bright orange hair which was nothing like ours, and a unique personality which I adored. The first six weeks of his life were filled with all the physical annoyances: the aches, the swelling, the drastic shifts in mood and physical appearance. None of that mattered, though; this little man brought us so much joy that I reveled in each tiny cry.

I desperately logged into my computer whenever he slept, searching for any work-from-home jobs that would have me. Finding none, before my maternity leave ended, I went to the office to convince my employer that I could write for the company at home. He sat and listened. He sat and listened. He nodded and empathized, but in the end said, “I understand the demands of parenting, but I need you here to talk with the others and really make sure that everything you write is where it needs to be.”

I wanted to cry and scream at once. Instead, I politely thanked him and returned home to absorb every moment of freedom with my family before my maternity leave ended.
"I wanted to cry and scream at once. Instead, I politely thanked him and returned home to absorb every moment of freedom with my family before my maternity leave ended."

JESSICA AND HER SON WYATT

WYATT, ALEXANDRA AND ANNABELLE
Day one at work, minus baby

When the big return-to-work day came, I imagined some Hollywood scene: children crying, my husband begging me not to go. Instead, we had breakfast together, I fed the baby, and then I left with our new strategy locked in my brain. I’ll come home and feed him on my lunch break.

My husband constantly messaged me throughout the day. We worked opposite schedules so we could be home to care for the children. He sent pictures and videos while I was away. By lunchtime, I raced home and took comfort in the freedom of living close enough to spend my hour-long break with my family. The girls sat with me during their brother’s feeding, and we talked about what we wanted to do when my shift ended. The new routine empowered me. I could love my kids and my work. I found a broader sense of purpose.

It created a slew of new obstacles too. The baby developed separation anxiety. As soon as I brushed my hair every morning, the tears came. The alarm sounded. He wailed and reached for me. Once he could crawl, I had a small person attached to my leg.

My heart filled with such love knowing I mattered that much to him, but it burst when I left. I suffered as much as he did. I had to designate a stuffed animal for him as a mommy-replacement. It became our routine. I roared and handed him his plush dinosaur as he laughed. He still cried sometimes but hugging his toy comforted him when I walked out the front door.

We had to follow a strict routine around the house during the week or no one got any sleep. My son wanted to eat every hour on the hour for months. To keep up with him I pumped milk during short breaks at work.

Pumping and other amazing feats

Breast pumps might not be a problem for some women, but I hate those things. It’s like putting your boobs in a funnel and waiting to be sucked dry. It offered none of the precious moments that feeding my son did, but I accepted the discomfort to balance my home and work life.

Having a full-time job and three kids was pandemonium. Breastfeeding a baby in that mess was insanity. My house became a zoo and my office, the circus. I worked for two hours, then pumped as much milk as I could. I worked for two more hours, then drove home to feed my son. Once back at the office I worked for two more hours, then pumped. After that I finished out the workday before speeding home to feed my baby.

Once my son’s stomach was filled, those of us not subsisting off a breast milk diet finally sat down and ate dinner together. This went on for a year.

Fast forward to the present

It went fast. I still don’t even know how I did it. Today, I continue sharing my lunch breaks at home, but with less urgency now that my son has weaned. My husband helps with the cooking and cleaning throughout the week, and my weekends are spent pretending that I’m an old-fashioned homemaker. I bake with the kids, help them with school, cheer them on during their extracurricular activities, and we take short trips.

I don’t want to say, “I have it all,” because I’m exhausted by the end of every day and sometimes before it even begins. But I’m not a martyr either. I’m just a mom who loves her family and her job. It’s not easy balancing the two, but with a lot of hard work and discipline I am able to enjoy a life with the rewards of a vocation and a loving family. If I could someday work from home that would probably ease a lot of the stress, but for now I am focused on enjoying the present.
After the birth of my son I witnessed the wonders of breastfeeding and was amazed by how breast milk is so much more than just food. It is such a special bond and the central piece to my whole mothering journey! As a working mother, the time eventually came when I had to return to work, and this presented a challenge. I knew I wanted to continue providing my son with the many health and immune system benefits of breast milk when apart from me, and the tender breastfeeding connection when with me. Prior to giving birth I hadn’t considered how breastfeeding would fit into the whole picture when returning to work. Thinking back now, I cannot even recall it coming up in conversation with colleagues! Thankfully, I had been introduced to La Leche League shortly after giving birth. And by the time my return to work date had arrived, I was a very active member of La Leche League South Africa’s Facebook group.

It was on that Facebook group that I was surprised to discover that working and breastfeeding mothers are protected by South African law. And employed mothers in South Africa are allowed breastfeeding or expressing breaks at work. As a scientist by trade, I am a naturally curious person. That curiosity prompted me to dig further into South African maternity and breastfeeding or expressing break laws—and to discover how much those laws differed from other countries.

Gwynneth and her husband Stanley with their son Christian (now 4) at the Afrikaans Language Monument, Paarl
How South African law handles return-to-work issues

Under South African law, breastfeeding mothers are protected under the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) applies to all employers and workers. It regulates maternity leave, working hours, employment contracts, deductions, pay slips, and termination in South Africa.[1]

Under the BCEA, a “Code of Good Practice on the Protection of Employees during Pregnancy and after the Birth of a Child” (COGP)[2] provides guidelines and legal requirements for employers and employees regarding protecting women’s health from potential work environment hazards during pregnancy, after the birth of a child, and while breastfeeding. The code not only addresses hazardous working conditions; it also contains breastfeeding or expressing break requirements. Under the COGP, point 5.13 states:

“Arrangements should be made for employees who are breast-feeding to have breaks of 30 minutes twice per day for breast-feeding or expressing milk each working day for the first six months of the child’s life.”

After learning that I was allowed to express at work, I was faced with another challenge—where could I express at work? The modern design of my work building (glass walls and an open floor plan) wouldn’t provide much privacy for expressing! Locating an empty office felt like an impossible task with someone working in every single office. So, I was still doubtful about whether I would be allowed to express at work. I was so saddened to hear of some mothers expressing in toilet cubicles, and thinking they had to stop breastfeeding when returning to work. In many cases I heard of, it seemed mothers never even asked about the options available to them because they felt there were none. The option to express simply was never even considered or suggested by management.

A friend at work had returned from maternity leave around the same time I did, and we found ourselves facing this new challenge together.

Having introduced her to La Leche League South Africa’s Facebook group, we both felt prepared and aware of how other mothers had navigated the challenge of expressing at work.

Misinformed South African employers may need prompting

Despite being legally bound to allow mothers to continue breastfeeding or expressing at many employers are not well informed on

I was faced with another challenge—where could I express at work?

After managing to express in various locations, one manager suggested we use the sick bay for expressing. It is private and access controlled and contains a basin to rinse pump parts as well as comfortable seating. Finally, a setup I could work with! This would be my expressing bay at work for the remaining months until my son turned one year old. But unfortunately, that location wasn’t always available when I needed it. However, on the rare occasion that it wasn’t available I managed to find an alternate spot to express.
Employed breastfeeding mothers are still being discriminated against and told they cannot express at work. Many employers feel it is up to company owners to decide whether to permit breastfeeding or expressing breaks. Mothers are often told the breastfeeding or expressing breaks are not paid breaks and these breaks are to be taken during lunch times or tea times. This is incorrect as paid lunch and tea breaks are provided for by BCEA.

If the expressing breaks were to only take place during lunch or tea breaks it wouldn’t need to be stated in the COGP on the “Protection of Employees during Pregnancy and after the Birth of a Child.” These are all common misinterpretations of the COGP, and employers often use the broad terminology in the COGP to avoid granting employees paid breastfeeding or expressing breaks—either knowingly or from simply being misinformed on the topic.

The COGP protects breastfeeding employees by ensuring that they can continue to breastfeed when returning to work or expressing their milk for the first six months of baby’s life. The COGP does not specifically give clear guidance on providing a site for employees to express or a fridge for storage of expressed milk. Designating an “expressing bay” (a private expressing or pumping site) should go hand in hand with granting of breastfeeding or expressing breaks, but many employed mothers find themselves struggling to find appropriate places at work to express or to store their milk. Common practice is to make use of empty offices, conference rooms or storage rooms for expressing purposes. When fridges that have been designated for breast milk storage are not provided, mothers often use personal storage bags such as small cooler bags with ice packs inside to keep their milk cool during the day.

Comparing South Africa to the rest of the world

The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) recently released an advocacy tool called “Parents at Work: Leave & Breastfeeding Breaks by Country” that summarizes the breastfeeding or expressing breaks and mandated leave for 195 countries. You can check it out here: http://waba.org.my/paw-chart-2019/. This tool allows for a global look at where countries are in terms of breastfeeding support. Exploring this tool along with the laws in the following countries reveals some interesting truths.

In Africa:

Maternity leave:
- For most African countries, the maternity leave granted is between 1-14 weeks.[4]
- Social security is provided in 32 of the 53 African Countries (60%).[4]

Breastfeeding or expressing breaks:
- Most African countries provide paid breastfeeding or expressing breaks totalling 60 minutes, with country-specific limitations based on the age of the child.[4]

In South Africa, specifically:

Maternity leave:
- Government employees: Mothers are all allowed 16 weeks of paid maternity leave.[1]
- Non-government employees: Mothers are allowed 16 weeks of maternity leave, but some private companies offer more. Only the first six weeks from the day of birth are paid maternity leave. For any maternity leave taken beyond six weeks, pay is up to each individual employer’s discretion.[1]
Both non-government and government employees: After using up their employer-paid maternity leave, some mothers want to take more maternity leave, even if unpaid by their employers. Mothers may negotiate with their employers for more time off from work, using annual leave and/or unpaid leave, however it is up to each individual employer’s discretion.

Non-government employees: Mothers who contribute to the Department of Labour’s Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) are eligible to claim up to 60% of their gross monthly salary, if maternity leave of four months is not paid in full by their employer.[5]

Breastfeeding or expressing breaks:
- For both government and non-government employees, paid breastfeeding or expressing breaks are allowed until the child is six months old. [2]
- Non-government and government employers may offer designated lactation rooms for employees, complete with fridges for human milk storage, at their discretion. They are not under legal obligation to do so.
- Academic institutions are also coming on board with breastfeeding support on campuses in South Africa. For example, Stellenbosch University and the University of the Western Cape are two tertiary institutions that have unveiled breastfeeding or expressing rooms on their campuses.

Comparing all seven continents

Europe and Central Asia are setting the best example, globally, for breastfeeding support:

- All except six of the 53 countries (11%) in Europe and Central Asia offer paid breastfeeding or expressing breaks. The six that don’t are the United Kingdom, Serbia, Malta, Iceland, Finland and Denmark.[4]
- The maternity leave in Europe and Central Asia is 13 ≥ 26 weeks, with most countries toward the higher end of that scale at 18 ≥ weeks.[4]
- Sixty percent of countries offer paid expressing breaks for at least six months and beyond.[4]
- Maternity leave granted in these South American countries ranges from 12 weeks to 26 weeks.[4]
- Jamaica has a great deal of work to do though. Only 1-11 weeks maternity leave is offered there, with no breastfeeding or expressing breaks at all.[4]

The United States pales in comparison to most countries on the topic of maternity leave and breastfeeding or expressing breaks:

- Mothers in the United States, according to the Department of Labor at https://www.dol.gov/whd/fmla, and as mentioned in part in the WABA document, are granted 12 weeks of unpaid maternity leave. [4]
- Breastfeeding or expressing breaks at work are provided until the child is 12 months old, but these are unpaid breaks per the Department of Labor’s website.[4]
- In the United States, the “Fairness for Breastfeeding Mothers Act” was recently passed, which should help move things in the right direction. This law requires federal buildings to offer lactation rooms. It also states that the room must be private. It must contain a chair, a working surface and an electric outlet. Hopefully more governments worldwide will follow suit.[6]

In the Western Hemisphere, the maternity leave and breastfeeding or expressing breaks situation looks much better in South America than it does in North America:

- Sixty percent of countries offer paid expressing breaks for at least six months and beyond.[4]
Major successes and big areas to improve upon for maternity leave and breastfeeding or expressing breaks in the Arab States

- The Arab States (including United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, etc.) have the lowest nationally mandated maternity leave globally, with just 1-11 weeks for most.[4]

- In these states, most offer anywhere from 60 to 120 minutes per day of paid breastfeeding or expressing breaks, until the child is anywhere from 12 to 24 months old.[4]

- Lebanon and Oman are the only two Arab State countries not providing any breastfeeding or expressing breaks.[4]

Other interesting findings

- Asia-Pacific countries (including Australia, Pakistan, Thailand, etc.) make up the highest number of countries worldwide not providing breastfeeding or expressing breaks, at 33% (14 out of 42 countries).[4]

- The remaining 28 out of 42 countries (such as Philippines, Mongolia, etc.) provide paid breastfeeding or expressing breaks of 40 to 120 minutes, with limits based on the child’s age.[4]

- Mothers in Indonesia and New Zealand are guaranteed breastfeeding or expressing breaks, with no explicit limit on the age of the child.[4]

Change is worth the effort

Overcoming my initial difficulties paved the way for other colleagues after me to express at work, and for that I am grateful. Knowing there is a place to express and that breastfeeding or expressing breaks are being supported there helped ease other mothers’ stress about returning to work. I was excited to see most of my colleagues returning from their maternity leaves expressing for their babies.

The expressing breaks at my workplace are now part of a work policy, further supporting each breastfeeding employee’s right. Despite the South African code that only allows for paid breaks until a child is six months old, all expressing employees at my workplace are allowed breastfeeding or expressing breaks until they decide to stop expressing at work!

Still more progress to make

When it comes to breastfeeding and the issue of a working mother’s right to breastfeed, South African employers still have a lot of work to do. For far too long breastfeeding has not been considered a workplace issue. In South Africa, most mothers are compelled to work to financially support their families. Women are now also working in male dominated industries where the workplace has not yet evolved to accommodate breastfeeding employees, further limiting women’s right to express at work.

With that, companies are slow to realise how supporting breastfeeding benefits them. But just like there are companies not adhering to the COGP, there are many companies moving towards empowering their employees by having a designated space for expressing, equipped with fridges to store their milk in. These companies have realized the benefits of increased employee satisfaction and fewer employee days off due to babies receiving the immunological benefits of breast milk. These companies are also encouraging employee contentment and loyalty. This all adds up to a more productive workplace!

No matter which country you live in, it is not just the breastfeeding mother’s responsibility to fight for adequate maternity leave to bond with her baby and establish a strong milk supply.

Or for the right to continued breast milk provision for her baby when the mom returns to work, by being granted adequate expressing breaks. It is her manager’s, colleagues’ and everyone’s responsibility!
References


Learning to Trust My Body’s Birth & Breastfeeding Powers

By USA and Pin-Ching Cynthia Tsai, Dulworth, USA

I never thought I would breastfeed my baby because I was not breastfed. I also never believed I could face birth. After all, pain as tiny as a paper cut drives me crazy! But all those assumptions began to change when a family friend who is a former La Leche League Leader gifted me The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding when I was pregnant.

Becoming a book worm and choosing Baby Friendly

That book, along with attending a doula’s prenatal classes, was essential in teaching me valuable information about breastfeeding, birth and motherhood. I was able to shed some doubts and concerns as I learned that a mother can breastfeed her baby regardless of the size of her breasts. I also learned that some interventions at birth can negatively affect breastfeeding by making babies too tired to nurse effectively, which in turn can affect a mom’s milk production. As I increased my determination to breastfeed and birth naturally, my husband and I sought out the only Baby Friendly hospital in our area to ensure our baby would spend precious time skin-to-skin on my chest after birth, to help get breastfeeding off to a good start.

Still, a few months before birth I often found myself in tears, fearing the pain of labor. So, I did more research; read tons of books about pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding; attended a new moms’ group to hear other moms’ experiences; and attended local La Leche League meetings.
Yoga and affirmations for courage

New routines also increased my positivity. Prenatal yoga became my morning regimen for strength and relaxation. Instead of eating out, my husband and I started cooking more iron and protein-rich homecooked meals together. I also prayed daily for courage and comfort, and gathered encouraging affirmations. I started trusting my body, embracing all its incredible abilities. The more that I educated myself and took care of my body, the more I let go of fear. After discussing my birth and breastfeeding plan in detail with my doula and my midwife group, I felt ready to accomplish my goal of a natural, non-medicated birth.

Ready, set, birth!

I believe there is a special connection between a mother and an unborn baby. Once I got to the 39-week pregnant mark, I started resting more than usual, as if my baby was signaling my body to prepare as she was getting ready to meet the world. I had been at a standstill: one centimeter dilated for a week. In addition, my cervix had thinned out and my baby’s head was low. Yet I was having no signs of active labor.

At a prior appointment with my midwife, we had discussed some natural ways to induce labor and the possibility of induction if my baby was still not born after 41 weeks. I was determined to avoid being induced so that I could maintain more control of my body and stay away from medications which might affect breastfeeding.

But thankfully induction wasn’t a concern as in the middle of the night, at just over 39 weeks pregnant, a little bit of blood made me remember what a doula had told me about a “mucus plug.” I can still remember my call to the midwife right after, “Is this what you mean by a mucus plug?” The on-call midwife reassured me. Then fifteen minutes later, I rang her again as my water broke and my body was shaking—with no contractions in sight. She reassured me again: all is normal.

My mind quickly settled back to a calm state as I reminded myself: I am prepared. Our midwife gave us the option to stay at home for now. My husband made me some scrambled eggs to boost my energy, as he knew I wouldn’t be allowed to eat at the hospital.

Not long after, the contractions started up gradually. Deep breathing helped me cope. Meanwhile, I was even able to catch a little sleep in between contractions and take a relaxing shower.

Several hours later, my husband and I decided that it was time to go to the hospital. In the triage area, they determined I was now four centimeters dilated! The contractions were getting closer and closer together.

Before my final push,
I touched my little one’s head with my hands and determined to gather every working muscle I could to push that baby out.

The hospital admitted me, and I was immediately transferred to the labor and delivery room. Labor progressed faster than I thought. I was already at 7.5 centimeters dilated in just three hours! I had planned to be moving around at this point, but I found it more comfortable to stay in bed.
“Let’s turn on your playlist,” my husband intuitively recommended what I needed. Classical music always soothes me, perhaps because as a pianist it feels like coming home. Meanwhile, my doula gave me a gentle massage whenever contractions came. I imagined the contractions were waves that come and go, and used rhythmic breathing and deep humming to try to remain calm. Surprisingly, I was so relaxed that I was able to fall asleep for a little bit in between contractions and even smile occasionally at the thought of my baby’s arrival!

The final push

By noon, I was fully dilated and ready to push. My mother-in-law, who inspired me to choose a non-medicated birth and breastfeeding, had just landed in Chicago. She rushed to the hospital as the pushing commenced.

By then I was getting onto all fours for the first 45 minutes of pushing, as if I was doing yoga. Gravity really helped me! Then I switched to laying on my side for a few pushes.

Finally, I felt my long-awaited baby moving through the tunnel and had more confidence in controlling my muscles there.

Before my final push, I touched my little one’s head with my hands and determined to gather every working muscle I could to push that baby out. Within a minute, the room was filled with a triumphant cry from our baby. My husband joyfully announced, “It is a girl!” I’ve never felt so powerful in my life. I was so proud of myself, my baby, and my amazing coaching team (my dear husband and doula). And I felt so lucky.

Thankfully, my labor was not as painful as some birth stories. Still, it required courage and fully trusting my body’s abilities. Our daughter seemed so content skin-to-skin on my chest. She held onto my finger tightly with her tiny hand as we enjoyed our first quality cuddle time.

Not long after her birth, she started showing some hunger signs with sucking motions on her lips. I knew she must have been exhausted from working hard with her mommy during labor, and likely hungry. My mother-in-law later described the incredible flip our precious daughter performed as she moved through the tunnel to come out into the world.

We had a magical first nursing session in laidback position with our fabulous nurse checking on the latch while my daughter continued holding my finger. We stayed in the labor and delivery room about two hours after the birth and soaked up every possible moment with our baby girl. We also shared many beautiful pictures with family and friends.
When it comes to World Breastfeeding Week (WBW), La Leche League Leaders, supporters and breastfeeding advocates around the world know how to party! The first week of August marks the celebration date in most areas of the world, while some countries—Canada, Italy, Switzerland, Sweden, Germany, Austria, Belgium and France—celebrate in October.

Historically, the event honors the August 1990 signing of the Innocenti Declaration by government policymakers, the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and other organizations. That document helped pave the way for protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding worldwide. But there is still much work to be done!

This year, the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) selected the #WBW2019 slogan, “Empower Parents, Enable Breastfeeding” for the event, to be inclusive of all types of parents in today’s world and to show how breastfeeding is a team effort with the support of others. In addition, WHO worked with UNICEF and partners to promote the importance of family-friendly policies.

What were the major policy goals for the event? To raise awareness of the global need for paid maternity leave for a minimum of 18 weeks, as well as paid paternity leave. Also, to shine a spotlight on the need for workplaces that protect and support continued breastfeeding upon return-to-work. This includes affordable childcare; employee access to breastfeeding or milk expression breaks; a safe, private and hygienic space for expressing and storing human milk; and affordable childcare.

Thank you to everyone who shared their WBW August event photos with us. Please keep the photos coming, and we will continue to post them! Email yours to editorbt@lli.org.

Source: https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2019/08/01/default-calendar/world-breastfeeding-week-2019
At the Big Latch On in Henry County, Georgia, USA, in the Education Center at Piedmont Henry Hospital, over 100 people were in attendance.

A reported 28 babies in attendance latched at the same time, 10:30 a.m.!

This is the group's seventh year hosting the event.

Bolivia hosted a tetada (a group) photo session of babies breastfeeding at the same time.

Partners accompanied those in attendance to cheer them on!
Ecuador (above) made a beautiful video of a mother nursing to advertise their WBW held at the Citizen Health Fair.

You can see it here: https://www.facebook.com/Laligadelaleche/videos/vb.505154916300320/418752278737466/?type=2&theater

“Liga de la Leche El Salvador“ (La Leche League in El Salvador) served cake and fun, with speakers, breastfeeding-themed displays (like above) and plenty of laughter.
Families in Mexico had a grand celebration, thanks to the ingenuity of Liga de La Leche Saltillo, Mexico, who put on a big family celebration that was complete with displays and fellowship.

All around Aotearoa, New Zealand, Big Latch On events, along with great raffle prizes, drew breastfeeding families far and wide. In addition, in honor of World Breastfeeding Week, La Leche League New Zealand’s director, Janine Pinkham, was interviewed by the parenting website Crash Landing.

You can check out the article here: https://www.crashlanding.online/post/interview-with-janine-pinkham-director-la-leche-league-new-zealand
At Ministerio De Salud Pública Y Bienestar Social, La Leche League Paraguay families displayed their breastfeeding pride and their beautiful babies!

La Leche League Portlaoise celebrated 30 years of supporting breastfeeding families in the Midlands of Ireland.

They held a Family Celebration in the Brigidine Convent Hall in Mountrath. In total, 66 adults, 28 children and 11 babies attended—including many grandchildren of the women who first attended the group 30 years ago!

It was a wonderful celebration of years of friendship. Eight out of the nine La Leche League Leaders from the group’s 30 years of history were present at the celebration.
Black Breastfeeding Week: Then and now

Black Breastfeeding Week (BBW) was launched over seven years ago in the United States and the event was originally only celebrated in the U.S. But in recent years, Great Britain and other countries have also joined in the cause. Raising awareness of disparities in black mothers’ breastfeeding rates compared to other groups, and possible remedies for these disparities, is what this week is all about. This year, more than 160 events were held—a public demonstration of commitment and solidarity with black parents everywhere. Numerous organizations, health centers and businesses contributed to the celebration, with moments of education and support.

Many news outlets as well as families in attendance reflected on the impact of the days of slavery, when black mothers in the United States were forced to nurse white slave owners’ babies. Many black mothers shared that this aspect of history caused them to think of breastfeeding in a bad light.

Lack of adequate and culturally relevant support, along with fewer opportunities for higher education opportunities due to the socioeconomic status of many black families, have only made matters worse. According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, of all ethnic groups, black women in the U.S. have the lowest breastfeeding initiation rates at 64%, and the shortest breastfeeding duration (only 14% babies are breastfed at 6 months of age).[1]
Infant formula companies have also played a key role in fueling this disparity. Since the 1970s, massive marketing campaigns run by infant formula companies have created the idea that formula is a product for sophisticated people, while breastfeeding is a practice belonging to a different class. This messaging had a huge echo for a long time in most minority groups. Still today, black women use formula at higher rates, according to the U.S. National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health.[2]

So the past continues to haunt us in the present. According to BlackBreastfeedingWeek.org, the infant mortality rate for black babies is double (and in some place, nearly triple) that of white babies, due to premature birth, low birth weight, and sicknesses related to too-early births.[3] Also, many studies show that black mothers generally breastfeed less and for a shorter time than white mothers. The causes of low breastfeeding rates and high infant mortality among the black population in the USA are certainly complex and stem from systemic racial inequities. Nevertheless, in the present time, culturally-relevant lactation support, both during the first few days and in later months, can certainly make a huge difference.

In the United Kingdom, mortality rates are sadly similar. As in the United States, a history of breastfeeding trauma has passed from generation to generation within the black community and it still hinders breastfeeding nowadays. According to the Office of National Statistics, in 2013, black babies had the highest infant mortality rates, 6.3 deaths per 1,000 live births compared to other ethnic groups. Moreover, black babies had the highest infant mortality rate for low birthweight births, at 54.1 deaths per 1,000 live births.[4] However, contrary to expectations, the United Kingdom Health and Social Care Information Centre, Infant Feeding Survey 2010, highlighted that black mothers were significantly more likely to breastfeed than white mothers, with a breastfeeding initiation rate of 95%. Also notable was the low fall-out rate-- 85% of black mothers were still breastfeeding at six weeks and 73% were still breastfeeding at four months.[5]

It’s not easy to determine the reasons behind higher breastfeeding rates in the United Kingdom versus the United States. A possible explanation could be attributed to the persistence of strong cultural roots versus the degree of integration within a community other than the one of origin. This highlights how important the relationship of a particular ethnic group with the society in which it lives is.[6]

What can be done?

To be a part of the solution, we need to work together “to address barriers experienced disproportionately by black mothers, including earlier return to work, inadequate receipt of breastfeeding information from providers, and lack of access to professional breastfeeding support,” as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends.[1]

Most people know that breastmilk is beneficial in preventing many health issues later on in life. But what many of us may not be aware of is that breastfeeding can actually save black babies’ lives by decreasing infant mortality rates by as much as 50%. That’s according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.[3]

We know that families are more successful at reaching their human milk feeding goals if they are surrounded by lactation support that is culturally relevant to them. In fact, Black Breastfeeding Week was created to respond to this need and to increase knowledge of correct and evidence-based information, inside and outside the black community.

As this year’s Black Breastfeeding Week theme conveyed, “The World is Yours: Imagine, Innovate, Liberate!” Let’s be creative and bold in the ways we stand with black mothers around the world, so they do not feel isolated. Let’s continue to fight for racial equality on all fronts. Reducing racist treatment in any area of life affects health outcomes for babies and their families. No less important, so they know they have everything their babies need to help them thrive, just like any parent would want to feel.
Sources:


FIVE STEPS TO AN EASIER RETURN TO EMPLOYMENT OR EDUCATION

You’ve imagined it for weeks and probably done your fair share of worrying. The big day has arrived for you to either return to paid work or perhaps further your education! But the site will not allow you to bring your baby with you. What to do? Take a big breath and gather—or at least identify—everything you need to take with you each day prior. With a little preparation, you’ll help the first few days go as smoothly as possible.

### Step 1: Items you’ll need

#### Items for your baby

- Extra baby clothes, nappies and wipes for your childcare provider
- Emergency phone numbers written out for your childcare provider
- Enough expressed milk for one day, plus a little extra
- Food for your baby, if baby is over six months
- Bib(s), if your little one is drooling up a storm from teething!
- Baby’s favorite toy/object, if childcare permits it

#### Items for you

- Purse or bag with work/school items needed the next day
- Cell phone and cord (be sure to charge it the night prior!)
- Water bottle
- Human milk storage bags/container
- Breast pump and all its parts or an adequately sized container for hand expressing, along with whatever you need for washing and drying your equipment
- A cooler bag and ice pack for transporting milk (and awareness of where you plan to express and store your human milk)
- A printed picture of your baby or recorded baby giggles on your cell phone, to help get your milk flowing (optional)
- A detailed list of tasks to do when you wake up. Include, for example, “Take expressed milk out of the freezer/fridge”!
Step 2: Morning feeding

Wake up and feed your baby right away (you may need to get up a bit earlier than usual even if your baby is still sleepy. Breastfeed again if possible before you leave home, or if not at childcare. Then, check in with your childcare provider periodically during the day to be sure all is going well.

Step 3: Lunch break

At lunchtime, arrange to go to your baby to nurse, even if only for the first day or two. Whenever your baby would normally be breastfeeding, pump or hand express at every opportunity that you are legally entitled to in order to maintain your supply. If you want to increase your expressed milk output, consider hand expressing at the end of some pumping sessions and/or massaging your breasts while expressing/pumping.

Step 4: Get ready to head home

At the end of the day, collect your expressed milk and pumping equipment to take home. As soon as you can, transfer the milk to the refrigerator or freezer, anticipating what you will need to go to childcare the next day. Then, make sure all your gear is ready for the next time. If you have a dedicated bag, it makes it much easier to get into a routine of being sure everything is ready and together in one place.

Step 5: End of the Day

At the end of the day, breastfeed your baby when you reunite, and enjoy the opportunity for a relaxed time to reconnect with your baby. Talk to your childcare provider about how the day went. Once home, breastfeed on demand to keep up your milk supply and cuddle time. Anticipate that your baby may want to feed more frequently during the time that you are together.

There will always be some days that seem harder than others. You might occasionally wonder whether it’s worth carrying on breastfeeding when you have to fit in expressing and feeding around the demands of work or study. Remember all the reasons it is so worth it! Talk to your employer if your schedule or lack of adequate expressing accommodations becomes an issue. And don’t forget to reach out to a local La Leche League (LLL) Leader with any concerns. (To find one near you, go to https://www.llli.org/get-help/)

A LLL Leader will help you find a path that works for you, and will always listen with a kind and non-judgemental ear.

To print out this handy tip sheet, click here.

Special thanks to Denise Ives, La Leche League Leader in Dunedin, New Zealand, for sharing several of these tips with us! For more helpful advice on combining work and breastfeeding, check out this link: https://www.llli.org/breastfeeding-info/working-and-breastfeeding/