

The Workplace and Pregnancy

Catherine Kassab is 25 weeks pregnant.

“Who knows Colin?” “Me!” “Who’s Colin?” “My brother!”

By day she’s a kindergarten teacher.

“All right, go ahead and bring those elbows up. We’re going to sidestep. Bring it in, side to side.”

By night she’s a pregnancy fitness instructor. Working while pregnant has posed challenges for her.

“I was nauseous 24/7, it was a struggle, you know, being in school and having to run to the bathroom or to the garbage can to throw up if I made it there.”

She wasn’t ready to tell her co-workers why she was sick.

“I wanted to definitely wait until the second trimester. I had some complications in my first trimester.”

Is there a right time to share your news?

“Unless you have to modify your work activities, I don’t see any reason you have to disclose your pregnancy to your job right away. We often tell pregnant women not to inform family and friends that they’re pregnant until they reach that miscarriage hump, and that’s usually after the first 12 weeks or first trimester.”

Candace Williams chose to share her news sooner.

“My husband and I, we decided to tell my company, my supervisor right around my 5 to 6-week marks, and I wanted to be able to notify my particular supervisor of the plan. I’m going to have doctor’s appointments coming up.”

“You’re really not under an obligation, but I will tell you transparency works very well in the workplace and it goes both ways.”

When you’re ready to share your news, whom do you tell?

“I would recommend telling your boss, but if you feel uncomfortable, if it’s just something that makes you really, really, nervous and anxious, go to your HR department and ask them for advice, because they’ll understand the culture within the organization.”

It’s up to you to find out what your rights are as a pregnant employee.

“My company was able to kind of lay everything out, and having constant dialogue with the human resource department, but then for a more, deeper dive, I’ve had to do that individual research myself.”

If your workplace has 15 or more employees, you’re protected under the Pregnancy Discrimination Act or PDA.

“PDA allows for women who are pregnant not to be discriminated against. They cannot be forced to take leaves. They cannot be forced to do or not to do things in the workplace.”

Generally, women can safely lift up to 25 pounds during pregnancy.

“If you’re not able to lift, you need to work out with your employer how you can accommodate that

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particular scenario that your physician recommends. Really important. Stay in contact with your physician. Stay in contact with your employer.”

If your company has 50 or more employees, you're eligible for the family and medical leave act or FMLA, as long as you've been with the employer for at least a year and have worked twelve hundred fifty or more hours in that year.

“You are eligible for protection of your job so you can have up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave. Now some employers will pay for pregnancy leave and maternity leave but it's a protection of unpaid leave for up to 12 weeks.”

Some states offer additional maternity leave benefits.

“I think I might take a month off and summer school. Yea.Yea”

Talk with co-workers and friends and learn from their experiences. That can be especially helpful if you work for a small company and are not eligible for FMLA or PDA.

“I would go to the owner and talk with them a little bit about, you know, I want to make sure that I'm pulling my load. That I'm doing what's best for you and your organization. I also want to make sure I'm able to take care of my family. Just have a plan. Be flexible with your plan but have a plan.”

To perform your best on the job while pregnant, be sure to get plenty of rest.

“Your body is building a baby. It requires a ton of energy. So, it makes sense that you're going to feel fatigued and tired. So, while you're at the work place, you may want to take frequent breaks, maybe stretch a little. And make sure you're drinking plenty of fluids because being hydrated can help keep your energy level up. Sometimes snacking frequently can help.”

“Chicka, Chicka, boom, boom!”

Catherine practices what she teaches in her fitness classes and uses an exercise ball in her kindergarten class to help ease pregnancy discomfort.

“I tell all of my clients to get one. Take it to work if they can because it helps with posture. It just helps with any kind of pain. With round ligament pain and back pain and the pressure that's on your bladder and pelvic floor. It helps bring everything up and back.”

Regardless of what's needed to do your job and protect your baby, the key is to be proactive and stand up for your rights.