

Returning to Work After Birth

There is no right or wrong answer for whether or when you should go back to work after having a baby. It depends on your family situation, finances and many other factors.

Here are some things to consider when it comes to going back to work. How much leave do you have, and is it paid or unpaid? This depends on your company and your state. According to the Family and Medical Leave Act, if you are working full-time, you are guaranteed unpaid leave for up to 12 weeks, as long as you've worked for a year or 1,250 hours at the same employer.

For many families, going 12 weeks without a paycheck is not possible. Ask your employer about how much family leave you can get and if it's paid or not paid. Your partner can also ask, since many employers offer partner leave.

Who will watch my baby? This can be a very difficult question. For some families, family members can help, but others need to find the best childcare they can. Unfortunately, quality childcare can be expensive, so it's a good idea to do as much research as you can.

When you're looking for childcare, here are some things to consider: Is the childcare provider or center licensed? What is the ratio of childcare providers to children? How old are the children in childcare? Is the facility or home equipped with the necessary safety equipment? What types of activities do they do? What does a typical day look like? What are the policies for picking up and dropping off children? Does the childcare provider have any additional training, for example infant CPR? Do they have immunization requirements, and do you meet them? If your child has special needs, is the provider equipped to handle them? What is the cost?

To find out if a caregiver is licensed in your state visit www.childcare.gov.

How will I pay for it? Childcare can be expensive, but you might be able to find help. State and local programs like Head Start and Early Start, along with state-funded prekindergarten classes, can help make childcare more affordable. You can also ask your employer or university if there is any type of subsidized childcare.

Before returning to work, try to practice your new routine. If possible, arrange for your childcare to start a week early so you can get used to being away from your baby.

If you're breastfeeding, this is also a good opportunity to start a new schedule of pumping and storing milk and get your baby used to taking a bottle, if she doesn't already know how.

It's natural to have mixed feelings about returning to work. You don't want to be away from your baby. But if you take the time to prepare and plan, eventually things will get easier for your family and you will know your baby is in a safe and happy place each day.