

View this article online at: [patient.info/news-and-features/looking-after-your-mental-health-when-going-back-to-work-after-having-a-baby](https://patient.info/news-and-features/looking-after-your-mental-health-when-going-back-to-work-after-having-a-baby)

# Looking after your mental health when returning to work after maternity leave

Your maternity leave ends and suddenly you've got to juggle parenting, work and all the trials and tribulations that come with it. It's easy to become overwhelmed and it's more important than ever to look after yourself. But how can you prioritise your mental health when you feel like you have no time?

## Returning to work after maternity leave

Heading back to work after maternity leave can be a difficult transition. It's not easy to leave your baby at nursery or with somebody else, and it can be difficult to switch between parent-mode and work-mode. A 2020 survey of 1,000 mothers found 31% found it harder than they expected to return to their job after an average of ten months' maternity leave<sup>1</sup>.

Dr Emma Haynes, psychotherapist and spokesperson for the [UK Council for Psychotherapy](#) (UKCP), says returning to work can lead to some difficult emotions and feelings.

"You may be wracked with guilt, not ready to leave your [baby](#) in someone else's care or concerned to make the right choice for your baby," she says. "You may even fear that your baby may bond with their carer and prefer them over you. Getting back into the flow of [work](#) may seem overwhelming and your ability to perform may be in doubt, particularly if you are struggling with [sleep deprivation](#)."

Going back to work can also lead to feelings of vulnerability and ambivalence towards a role you used to enjoy. "This can definitely impact your [mental health](#) negatively, causing [stress](#), [anxiety](#), [lack of energy](#) and low mood," she adds.

For some, it might be surprisingly easy to return and escape the bubble of [parenthood](#). However, this can lead to self-scrutiny and feelings of guilt.

UKCP-accredited psychotherapist Ali Ross says working parents often worry about missing key moments with their child, such as their first steps, first words and [bedtimes](#). "Alongside this, you may feel growing resentment around the [financial pressure](#) to work that might be taking you away from your child," he says.

Often, this can force the parent to rethink their principles and identity around work and parenthood and the tensions between them.

## **What kind of support is available for working parents**

Returning to your job can lead to mixed emotions, but there are steps you can take to make the process easier.

### **Ease yourself back into work**

It's tempting to throw yourself back into [work](#), but taking it slowly is important to avoid feeling overwhelmed. "Ask your employer for a back to work plan, which might include a phased return, so you have time to adjust to the change in your role from full-time parent to employee," says Haynes.

### **Use your Keep in Touch (KIT) days**

Ease yourself back into the [working](#) environment by using your KIT days. These let you go back to work for up to ten days during your maternity or adoption leave without it being affected. KIT days gives you a chance to catch up with colleagues and what's been going on so you don't feel completely out of the loop when you return.

### **Be honest with your employer**

Be open and up front about how you are finding it and ask for help from your employer if you are struggling. It is often useful to tell them how they can help you, for example, by changing or reducing your hours.

### **Talk to friends and family**

Speak to peers, [support groups](#), and friends and family – particularly if they have first-hand experience. There are also plenty of forums and networks to provide practical advice and solutions for working parents. Charities like [Working Families](#) offer advice around parental leave.

## **Request flexible working**

You can ask for [flexible working](#), such as working from home, working different hours, shift patterns or workdays. Your employer does not necessarily have to agree, but they do need to discuss your requirements and respond in writing within three months with their decision.

You can also ask about [breastfeeding](#) and suitable rest facilities. Employers are legally required to provide a space for parents who are breastfeeding to rest if they need to. Although there is no legal right for your employer to provide breastfeeding breaks at work, you can still discuss this with your employer.

## **Lower your expectations**

"Many people return to work and then consider quitting due to too high expectations of themselves," explains Haynes.

It's mentally and physically strenuous to work and look after a child, so give yourself credit for what you manage to do. You might not be able to do as much as you did before you had a [baby](#), but that's understandable.

## **Know your rights**

Knowing your rights around [breastfeeding](#), maternity rights, childcare and time off when a child is sick can be helpful. [Citizens Advice](#) also offers support and guidance regarding maternity rights and returning to work.

## **Further reading**

1. Tena: [Back to work: How mums really feel](#).

**Disclaimer:** This article is for information only and should not be used for the diagnosis or treatment of medical conditions. Egton Medical Information Systems Limited has used all reasonable care in compiling the information but makes no warranty as to its accuracy. Consult a doctor or other healthcare professional for diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions. For details see our [conditions](#).

Authored by: Lydia Smith	Peer Reviewed by: Dr Krishna Vakharia, MRCGP	
Originally Published: 20/11/2023		Document ID: doc_32129

---

View this article online at: [patient.info/news-and-features/looking-after-your-mental-health-when-going-back-to-work-after-having-a-baby](https://patient.info/news-and-features/looking-after-your-mental-health-when-going-back-to-work-after-having-a-baby)

Discuss Looking after your mental health when returning to work after maternity leave and find more trusted resources at [Patient](https://www.patientaccess.com).

---



To find out more visit [www.patientaccess.com](https://www.patientaccess.com)  
or download the app



Follow us

