



Employer's Guide to
**Breastfeeding at
the Workplace**

Introduction

Employers are aware that employees returning to work after childbirth may want to continue breastfeeding and will require some form of lactation support at the workplace. While employers are supportive towards the needs of the working mothers, they may not know how to take the first step in providing this support.

This guide, a Project Liquid Gold initiative, is produced jointly by NTUC U Family, Health Promotion Board (HPB) and Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF). It provides employers with information on what employers can do to support their employees to continue breastfeeding after returning to work.

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Why Should Breastfeeding Be An Agenda for Employers

Having children are momentous and significant events in our lives. It is also often life changing because for parents, it represents an added responsibility of having a child to care for and having the financial means to do so. Few mothers can afford to stop work to look after their children and hence there are a significant number of working mothers in the workforce.

Benefits of Breastfeeding

The World Health Organisation and Health Promotion Board recommend exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months and to continue to two years and beyond. This is a novel concept especially in Singapore's deeply entrenched formula feeding culture. However this trend is changing as benefits of breastfeeding are far reaching and becoming more apparent to new mothers. Breastfed infants have fewer intestinal and respiratory infections, are less likely to be hospitalized and have a lower risk of developing certain chronic conditions like obesity, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, childhood asthma and childhood leukemia. The close bond as a result of this breastfeeding relationship has positive repercussions for a child's life and future, in terms of behaviour, speech, sense of wellbeing and security.

Breastfeeding mothers are also less likely to develop diseases such as ovarian, breast and womb cancer, hypertension, diabetes and heart attack. A healthy, worry-free mother means an employee who is able to contribute more productively to her workplace.

**Breastfeeding is environmentally friendly.
It is a renewable resource that does not require heating,
packaging and transport to deliver and has minimal carbon
footprint compared to formula milk.**

Support For Breastfeeding Mothers At Work

Every working mother after childbirth needs our protection and support at the workplace. Often, despite being at work full time, mothers worry about their babies and children at home. The most treasured thing about parenthood is having healthy children as it means freeing parents from the worry and burden of looking after a sick child. To this end, breastfeeding is the optimal nutrition for newborns and infants.

As maternity leave in Singapore is only for four months, many mothers may need to continue breastfeeding after going back to work to ensure optimum nutrition for their newborns. Hence there is the need to facilitate breastfeeding at work. On the other hand, working mothers who are not able to breastfeed, should also be given support in their chosen feeding method. Supporting breastfeeding mothers does not mean discrimination against non-breastfeeding mothers. On the contrary, they need even more support as there are more risks with formula feeding.



Why Mothers Need To Express Milk At Work

Contrary to popular belief, virtually all mothers can breastfeed given the right education, encouragement and support as well as practical assistance.

Milk is produced as long as there is effective removal. Hence to sustain milk production, a working mother needs to express milk about 2 to 3 times a day to maintain her supply. When the babies are 6 months old, they begin eating solid foods and the need to express milk reduces.

With sufficient support, mothers can both work and contribute to their children's health at the same time.



Benefits Of Being A Breastfeeding Friendly Employer

• Reduced Absenteeism

Employees need to take less time off to care for sick children as breastfed babies will be healthier throughout their infancy and childhood. Studies in the USA and elsewhere have shown that breastfed babies had statistically fewer episodes of illness than formula-fed infants and mothers of breastfed babies were absent only 25% of the time for one-day maternal absences compared to 75% of the time for mothers who bottle-feed their babies.¹

• Increased Productivity

With less absenteeism, work is not disrupted.

• Improved Employee Morale

Employers will enjoy better relations with their employees, resulting in a more motivated, committed and productive workforce.

• Lower Staff Turnover

Breastfeeding mothers are more likely to return to work and also do so earlier if employers extend support to continue breastfeeding. This saves employers the cost of replacing and training employees. A study on multiple companies with lactation support programs found an average retention rate of 94%.²

• Positive Corporate Image

Employees are more loyal to companies with family-friendly policies. This can lead to easier employee recruitment, better public image and higher shareholder value.

• Cost-Benefits

Employers who support their employees to continue breastfeeding find that the savings in reduced absenteeism and recruitment costs far outweigh that of providing breaks and facilities for breastfeeding.

¹ Zinn B. Supporting the employed breastfeeding mother. *Journal of Midwifery and Women's Health*. 2000;145(3):216-226.

² Ortiz J, McGilligan K, Kelly P. Duration of breast milk expression among working mothers enrolled in an employer-sponsored lactation program. *Pediatric Nursing*. 2004;30(2):111-119



What Can Employers Do To Help Employees Who Wish To Continue Breastfeeding

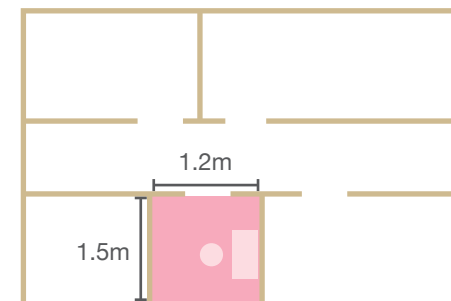
In order to continue working and breastfeeding, employees need the following support:

- **Place and Privacy during Milk Expression**

A breastfeeding employee needs a clean, comfortable, private and safe environment to express milk during the workday. An empty boardroom or corner of an office which offers some privacy for half an hour is often sufficient. Simple lactation rooms can be created out of little-used areas within existing building space. E.g. by sectioning off a small corner of a room with portable partitions. A lactation room can be as small as 1.2m by 1.5m to accommodate a comfortable chair and a small table for a breast pump.

Ideally, there should be an electrical outlet, a lock (for privacy) and a sink nearby for washing hands, pump attachments and milk containers. A refrigerator (the one at the office pantry will do) is ideal to store the expressed breast milk. Generally toilets are not suitable as it is unhygienic.

The figure below shows a possible set-up for a nursing room.



- **Flexible Breaks and Work Options**

Women typically require 2 or 3 pumping sessions of around 15-30 minutes each. The International Labour Organisation recommends two thirty minute breaks in an eight hour shift in addition to normal breaks.

If extra time is needed for milk expression, flexibility to make up the time before or after the usual work schedule helps make this expenditure of time manageable.

- **Supportive Workplace Culture**

Companies can demonstrate a commitment to creating a breastfeeding-friendly workplace by introducing a policy statement assuring working mothers that they can combine work and breastfeeding. A supportive workplace is one where supervisors and co-workers exhibit a positive, accepting attitude towards the breastfeeding employee.



Working Mum's Milk Kit

To encourage a breastfeeding friendly culture at the workplace, a Working Mum's Milk Kit comprising items like a "Nursing Mum Inside" door hanger, a "Mum Off to Pump" desk sign and "Mummy's Milk" milk labels is produced under Project Liquid Gold. The items in the kit serve to better facilitate the breastfeeding process for mothers while at work and is available for download and print on the U Family website at www.ufamily.org.sg/plg.



Funding Support

- **Work-Life Grant**

The WorkPro Work-Life Grant provides funding and incentives for organisations to create and sustain a more supportive environment for Singaporeans to form and raise families. Employers can be co-funded up to 50% (capped at \$20,000) for selected employee support schemes such as building lactation facilities.

Office building owners, Management Corporation and developers can also tap on the Work-Life Grant for building lactation facilities in office buildings.

- **U Flex Family Friendly Grant**

Organisations which had successfully tapped on the Work-Life Grant are eligible for an additional incentive of \$10,000 under the U Flex Family-Friendly Grant. To receive this grant, they are required to introduce family care leave and family support schemes such as lactation support policies.

Employer Spotlight: Sembcorp Industries

Energy and water company Sembcorp Industries recognises that as a company, its people are amongst its most valuable assets. In line with this, the company is committed to employee welfare and has put in place a number of family-friendly practices that include support for employees who are nursing mothers.

Since 2006, female employees of Sembcorp who returned to work after giving birth are encouraged by the availability of lactation facilities and equipment in Sembcorp's office at its corporate headquarters on Hill Street and in Jurong Island. Throughout the course of the working day, nursing mothers are able to take lactation breaks as and when needed and they are free to utilise a clean, conducive nursing room on office premises offering not just privacy and peace within individual cubicles, but also a hospital-grade lactation pump, power points, a steriliser and a refrigerator for expressing and storing breast milk.

What a Sembcorp Employee Says:

"The lactation facility in our office enabled me to keep both my children on breast milk for their entire first year without having to use formula. Because of it, I felt much more confident in my ability to mother my children while continuing to advance my career. In fact, in the case of my second child, I was able and willing to attend to work exigencies after 12 weeks because I knew I would have no problems continuing to nurse her given the good support from the company."

– **Thoh Jing Li**

*Assistant Vice President, Group Corporate Finance,
Sembcorp Industries*



Employer Spotlight: Infineon Technologies

Infineon Technologies is committed to supporting overall employee wellness which includes parenthood, work life balance and personal health. The decision to provide nursing rooms for working mothers to express their breast milk in the company arose from feedback gathered from breastfeeding mothers.

The nursing facilities in their two buildings can accommodate up to 4 nursing mums simultaneously and are equipped with power supply, tables, shelves for storage, comfortable chairs with back cushion, notice boards for sharing baby photos, magazines, parenthood brochures & articles, placemats, clocks and even photo frames to put their babies' photos to simulate breastfeeding. Refrigerators are available in the pantries of the respective office levels for the storage of expressed breast milk.

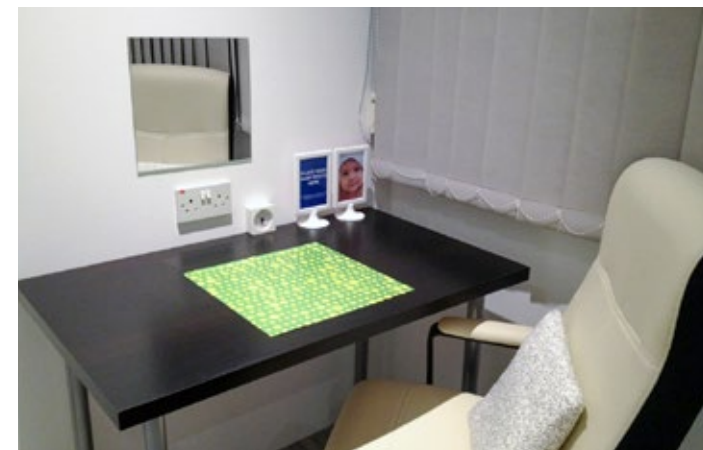
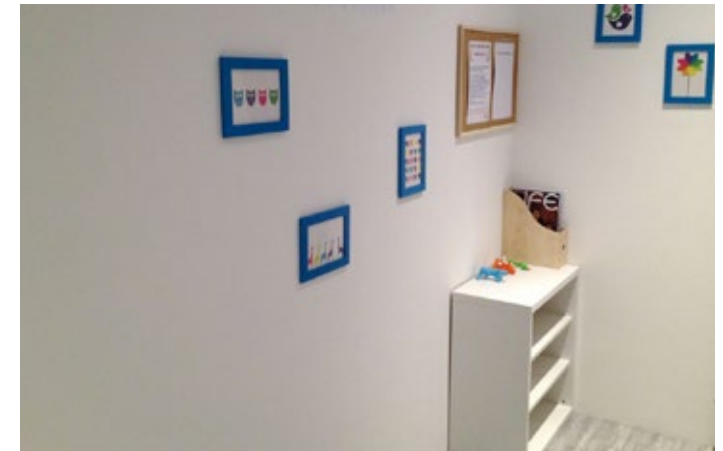
Providing a designated private space for expressing milk and allowing flexible scheduling to support milk expression during work is one of the steps to demonstrate their support for mothers returning to work.

What an Infineon Employee Says:

“As breastfeeding mothers, we need a private place to do expression. Before the nursing rooms, we need to look for places such as washrooms and meeting rooms which are not conducive. I also do not feel like going out at times if I cannot be sure the destinations have breastfeeding facilities. I am glad that we have a cosy place in the workplace for this purpose, even some of my friends commented it is good that my company provides nursing rooms.”

– **Adelynn Lee**

Receptionist, Site Facilities, Infineon Technologies



Innovative Nursing System Design Competition

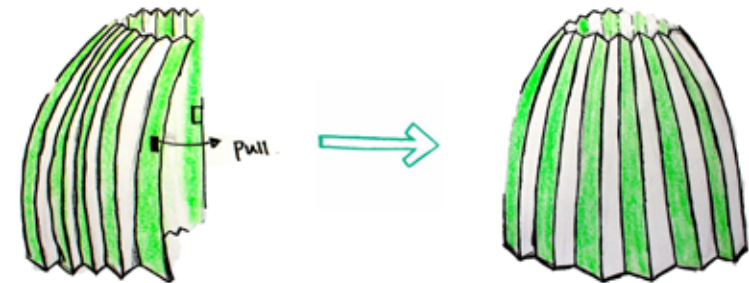
To raise awareness on facility design and the lack of proper nursing room space, NTUC U Family and the School of Design & Environment (DE) and Ideawerkz of Ngee Ann Polytechnic jointly organised the “Most Innovative Nursing System Design” competition. By tapping on the imagination and innovation of the students, the competition aimed to gather inputs on how to create a system that can be used as a temporary nursing room for breastfeeding mothers who need to express their breast milk at work.

Here is a showcase of the winning designs.

1st Prize Winner



The product is a temporary nursing system for mothers to express their breast milk in the common office environment. It is portable and can be set up easily by pulling the handles on the two edges of the structure. with the private enviroment it formed. Mothers now can sit comfortably while expressing their milk for their children.



family **Ngee ANN** **deawerkz**
Mobile Nursing Room

Breastfeeding is important for a child's early growth and development, it is also the perfect moment for mother-child bonding.

We hope that by increasing public awareness for the importance of breastfeeding, it would allow more mothers to feel at ease about expressing milk during work. However, many workplaces lack a nursing room, making it difficult for mothers to express breastmilk at work.

Did you know that breastfeeding...

- Reduces risk of:** Breast Cancer, Ovarian Cancer, Type 2 Diabetes, Postpartum Depression, High blood pressure, Heart Disease
- Increases:** Body immunity, Brain development
- Prevents:** Ear infections, Food sensitivities, Childhood asthma
- Increases:** Loyalty & retention of mothers, Recruitment incentives for women, Brand image in the Community, Productivity and morale of mothers, Mother's satisfaction in life and career

To better understand who we are helping, we did a survey involving 20 working mothers who are still breastfeeding, and here are the results.

Which feature is the most important to you in a work space nursing system?

Physical cover for privacy	A top profile for privacy	Ability to connect to power	Hygiene and health awareness	Nursing Room
29%	24%	6%	6%	35%

Which solution do you think would solve/alleviate the current challenges faced?

Portable nursing room in the office	48%
Importance of breastfeeding education	29%
Workstation set up to provide covers	18%
Chair set-up to provide covers	8%

Majority of mothers favoured a portable nursing station that provides privacy and discretion. Therefore, we have designed a mobile nursing room that is easy to set-up, providing an enclosed space for mothers to express milk comfortably.

Benefits of our Mobile Nursing System:

- Compact & Light: < 2kg
- Privacy Guaranteed
- Access to power
- < 2 mins set up time
- Affordable: < \$20
- User-friendly: Flexible design

Setting up the Mobile Nursing Room:

1. Undo the clip of the compact form to release the fabric.
2. Fix the pillars onto floor bases (Fabric not shown here due to illustration purposes).
3. Spread the base out (You may bring your chair into the room at this step).
4. Unfasten buttons of each fabric.
5. Extend all four rods upwards and adjust the rod height.
6. Ensure that the rods are secured in place.

Mobile Nursing Room Features:

- Hooks secured in place that can be released for quick exit.
- Small zip at the bottom for power supply to enter.
- Bottom hooks are tightly secured (Unhooking the fabric here allows for a curtain-like 'door' into and out of the room).
- Top view of the mobile nursing room, bottom fabric for added stability.

Mobile Nursing Room Description:

Our design provides a comfortable private space for mothers. Using nylon for the fabric, it is durable, lightweight, waterproof and opaque. A silver coating on the exterior makes it impossible to see through from the outside. However, from the inside, mothers would see the silhouette of anyone leaving outside.

The rods have adjustable height, are lightweight and strong. Each fabric can be easily unhooked from the rods. Unhooking is the basic function that enables parents mothers to enter or enter the room. We also added a small zipper to allow power supply access for your electronic breast pump.

Each rod comes with a base and a detachable bottom fabric that prevents the room from toppling over, resulting in a very stable room.

Extended Form (cm): HxWxL = 180 x 130 x 130 | Compact Form (cm): HxWxL = 60 x 6 x 6 | Weight: < 2kg

Front view of the mobile nursing room, fully opaque. | Transparent view on how the inside looks like.

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an NTUC initiative **SCHOOL OF DESIGN & ENVIRONMENT**

Easy to set up, Arrange it to your liking, foldable and detachable dividers are some of the qualities of hexashield which will provide mothers with the privacy they need.

Hexashield has customizable hexagonal plates for mirror, seat or power plug. hexagonal structures absorb excessive vibration which creates a sound proof system. Easy access to power supply to operate the breast pump while sitting comfortably to express breast milk. light to be carried easily.

Resources

• Building Family Friendly Workplaces

Employers can find out more about supporting female employees to continue breastfeeding after returning to work and/or how to tap on the U Flex Family Friendly Grant to help working caregivers manage responsibilities both at work and at home.

Contact U Family at ufamily@ntuc.org.sg for more information or enquiries.

• Workplace Health Promotion Grant

Visit www.hpb.gov.sg/healthatwork for more information on workplace health programmes.

HPB's WHP (Women's Health) Grant

With effect from 31st July 2013, HPB has extended the Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) grant to include an additional \$5,000 to cover women's cancer screening and women's health talks.

Visit www.hpb.gov.sg/womens-health to find out more.

• Work-Life Grant Enquiries and Application

Organisations or individuals who require more information on the Work-Life Grant, which is part of WorkPro, can contact SNEF and NTUC.

SNEF and NTUC are the only official programme partners appointed to market and administer the WorkPro Programme. Companies should approach only SNEF or NTUC for assistance, including consultancy service and advice to apply for WorkPro. This is provided at no cost to all companies.

National Trades Union Congress (NTUC)

Website: www.ntuc.org.sg

Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF)

Website: www.sgemployers.com

Acknowledgement

• Health Promotion Board

The Health Promotion Board was established as a statutory board under the Ministry of Health, Singapore, in 2001 with the vision of building "A Nation of Healthy People". HPB aims to empower the people of Singapore to attain optimal health, increase the quality and years of healthy life and prevent illness, disability and premature death. As the key driver of national health promotion and disease prevention programmes, HPB spearheads health education, promotion and prevention programmes as well as creates a health-supportive environment in Singapore. It develops and organises relevant health promotion and disease prevention programmes, reaching out to the healthy, the at-risk and the unhealthy at all stages of life – children, youths, adults and older Singapore residents. Its health promotion programmes include nutrition, mental health, physical activity, smoking control and communicable disease education. HPB also promotes healthy ageing, integrated health screening, and chronic disease education and management.

For more information, please visit www.hpb.gov.sg

• Singapore National Employers Federation

The Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) is a trade union of employers dedicated to preserving industrial harmony and helping employers achieve excellence in employment practices, thereby enhancing productivity, competitiveness as well as the quality of their employees' work life. With the support of over 3,000 corporate members, SNEF is an active player in facilitating the tripartite partnership among the Government, employers and unions

For more information, please visit www.snef.org.sg

• The Association for Breastfeeding Advocacy (Singapore)

The Association for Breastfeeding Advocacy (Singapore) – ABAS - is an alliance of healthcare institutions, healthcare professionals' associations, mother-support groups and individual healthcare professionals in private practice who see breastfeeding of infants as an important fundamental building block for the health of the nation. The association is committed to the well-being of both mothers and babies and will do its utmost to promote, protect and support breastfeeding and ensure that babies get the best start in life.

For more information, please visit www.abas.org.sg



An NTUC initiative, U Family is the voice for working families. We advocate the building of strong and happy families by championing work-life harmony.

Join U Family to receive regular updates on family engagement events and programmes. You will also be informed of opportunities to contribute and share your opinions.

Join U Family at www.ufamily.org.sg



New mothers continue to face challenges in nursing their child after they resume work. Therefore, **Project Liquid Gold** is an initiative by U Family targeted to raise awareness of the importance of breastfeeding and to advocate for more support for these new mothers who are returning to work after their maternity leave.

National Trades Union Congress

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