



World Breastfeeding Week



Back to work and breastfeeding

Supporting women to continue giving their baby the best while back at work

Brianna Tekii shares suggestions to help breastfeeding mothers returning to work

Senior Public Health Advisor, Brianna Tekii lives in Wairarapa and works across both Hutt Valley and Wairarapa DHBs. She is pregnant with her second child, due in October. Her first, Eloise, is now two and a half and, despite going back to work when her daughter was seven months old, Eloise was breastfed until she was over two.

Brianna is planning to take six months maternity leave this time around, crediting the effective and discreet advances in breast pump technology for making work far more do-able these days than it used to be for new mothers.

Eloise was exclusively breastfed until she was six months old when solids were introduced, and Brianna was adamant her baby was going to continue to receive all the advantages of breast milk even while she was working. She needed a good breast pump, and invested the time in finding one that met her needs.

Trying five different pumps before landing one that really worked for her, Brianna has a key piece of advice for working mums – try out lots!

“There are lots of different brands on the market and they all offer something slightly different,” she says. “I think the best way to select your pump is to know what is important for you and make that critical to your selection.”

“Don’t despair if the first one doesn’t meet your expectations,” Brianna advises. “Your breast pump is the one thing that is going to make you comfortable about leaving your baby at home while you go back to work. It is an investment and something that, when you get the right one, you will be so pleased you put the effort in to find the most effortless option.”

Breast pumps are much more unobtrusive now that they used to be, and almost silent. You can pump while mobile, and in almost any environment.

“The right pump is the best thing – it makes everything so much easier! Depending on your pump choice, expressing can be so discreet I have even expressed while at a conference!”

“Think of it like this. If the cost of the pump is relative to the cost of formula, it is worth it! A good pump might cost you \$400 but formula would be three times that, over time.”

Brianna says it helps a lot having a manager and colleagues that are supportive, and knowing you are amongst friends. She has rarely come up against any breastfeeding negativity, but recognises it may not be as easy for everyone.

NZ law stipulates that women must have space to breastfeed or express, that is not a bathroom, and mothers can always raise that with their workplace if need be. Knowing your rights is a good start.

Brianna knows that new mums can be nervous about what other people’s perceptions may be, and has some suggestions for back to work breastfeeding mums:



“Keep your breastmilk and all your gear in a cooler bag in the fridge. That way, no one needs to see it directly and it makes it so easy keeping it all together – you can just grab and go at the end of the day,” Brianna suggests.

“And negotiate an office with a door, or the use of one while expressing. It is really important you are comfortable to allow for let-down, and best expressing success.”

“I’d say invest in the pump that is best for you because if it is too hard a process, you’ll give up. Consider After Pay or seek an advance on your pay check if the initial outlay is difficult. And, if you need someone to talk it through with, get in touch!”

Email: Brianna.Tekii@huttvalleydhb.org.nz for advice around returning to work and breastfeeding. A good support network for breastfeeding mothers is The Little Latch On, held on Tuesdays, 10-11am in the Whānau room, Wairarapa Hospital.

Time for a treat! Brianna and baby Eloise relax while breastfeeding (Photo supplied)



Tess Longstaff (left) with Julie Foley, Wairarapa DHB’s Lactation Consultant

It takes a team

Tess Longstaff is passionate about babies. This comes as little surprise, given she has had three and works as a Midwife. It would be easy to suggest she would take breastfeeding and going back to work in her stride, and indeed she does, but with one key message... it takes a team.

Tess knows that it is not always an easy road, continuing to breastfeed while going back to work. She started her midwifery again when her second child was six months old, and expressed milk for a year. Now they are 3 and a half and it’s her newest babe, now one, who she is expressing for. She is hoping to keep breastfeeding her until she is two.

“I went back to work sooner this time, when my baby was only 4 months old, so I did find it harder and more of a challenge to leave her,” Tess admits. “But she is home with her Dad and getting all the goods from me, and I am doing what I do well here, so we are all winning.”

Breastfeeding and expressing at work can be considered a barrier for mothers, but the reality is that women that need to go to work after having babies need to be supported to do so, and New Zealanders can be assured there are employer obligations in place to provide for that.

“You need and deserve a private space to express,” Tess says, “and if you have that and you have the support of your colleagues, it can be a lot easier than you might think.”

“Women are notoriously bad at asking for help,” Tess says. “In my line of work I see it all the time. But to continue to breastfeed is best for your baby and if you need to be at work then you need to express and, in order to do that well, you need people in your corner.”

“It takes a team. You need to know that everyone around you supports you, and you need a champion that you can lean on for support if you come across any negativity.”

Tess has four top tips for mothers expressing at work:

- Consider taking a longer break than several short ones. Amalgamate the entitlement breaks into a longer period so you can hydrate, relax and encourage a better milk flow
- Stay hydrated. Nursing Tea is a really good supplement, and seems to really help with let down
- Eat! Eat more than normal and make it easy – take snack packs to work so you can graze often
- Thank your team. Let them know how much their support means to you and your baby