



The working woman's guide to pregnancy

You're not quite ready to divulge your happy news, but explaining away your exhaustion and frequent bathroom trips is getting tricky. Or you're uncertain what sort of maternity leave you're entitled to and, more importantly, how much of it is paid. These are just a few of the common scenarios you'll need to tackle as you navigate the next nine months on the job. Our detailed guide will see you through.

BREAKING THE NEWS One of the first challenges that comes up at work is deciding who to tell you're pregnant and when. Notifying your boss first is best; she shouldn't find out through the grapevine. But sometimes co-workers catch on first. On top of coping with fatigue, nausea and headaches, Stacie Haaga, R.D., a dietitian with the U.S. Apple Association, had to feign concern for a co-worker who thought he'd caught her "illness." "Finally, I looked him in the eyes and said, 'You don't have what I have, trust me,'" Haaga recalls.

While the majority of women wait until the end of the first trimester to break the news at work, others choose to delay the announcement as long as possible. Dallas bank executive Catherine Lynch divulged her first pregnancy at nine weeks but waited twice as long the second time around. "People treat you differently as soon as they know," she says. "I was passed over for additional responsibilities the first time because of my pregnancy and didn't want that to happen again."

By Kim Schworm Acosta

Illustration by Calef Brown

If you feel you're being treated differently because you're pregnant, call 9to5, the National Association of Working Women's confidential hotline at 800-522-0925, or e-mail them at hotline@9to5.org.

When you've decided the time is right, meet with your supervisor. Have a general idea of how long you'd like to take off for maternity leave, but don't bring it up unless you want to—there'll be time later to discuss specifics. And don't be offended if your boss doesn't offer congratulations immediately. "He'll take the news in the context of his own needs and

issues," says OB-GYN Marjorie Greenfield, M.D., associate professor at Case School of Medicine in Ohio and author of 2008's *The Working Woman's Pregnancy Book*. That doesn't mean you have to apologize—having children is your right, whether or not you're working.

COPING WITH SYMPTOMS ON THE SLY ▶ "Many women are surprised by how crappy they feel," says Greenfield. Follow these tips gathered from pregnant workers to help deal with common discomforts on the job.

For nausea

- * Sit next to a door during meetings so you can escape to the bathroom more easily.
- * Always have a change of clothing, paper towels and mouthwash with you.
- * Limit the amount of time you spend in the lunchroom—the smell of brewing coffee or a nuking burrito could make you feel even more nauseous.
- * Drink ginger ale or ginger tea in addition to water.

For fatigue

- * Use part of your lunch hour to nap in your car or office.
- * Take a walk, even if it's just around the office.
- * Stand up and stretch every couple of hours to relieve aches, pains and stiffness.

For lack of focus ("pregnancy brain")

- * Take copious notes and use "cheat sheets."
- * Do your most challenging tasks first thing when you get to work or when you're feeling your best.
- * Say no to requests to take on extra duties until you see how you are handling the basics.
- * Use your e-mail's calendar program to keep track of appointments and meetings.

If you sit a lot, use a small pillow for extra back support and put your feet up on a footrest, wastebasket or box. If you must stand for long periods, put one of your feet up on a footrest, low stool or box, switching feet often.

STAY SAFE ON THE JOB ▶ Your employer is required by law to provide a safe workplace, which means that in some cases, accommodations will have to be made due to your pregnancy. If your job involves exposure to chemicals, infection risk or intense physical demands, you can ask to be reassigned to a safer situation.

What if you're not sure whether you're in danger? For starters, ask your human resources department for a list of all potentially toxic substances to which you might be exposed (another legal requirement). Discuss it with your doctor or midwife and always wear safety gear and follow safety precautions to minimize your risk, says Greenfield. (For thorough data on workplace and environmental toxins in relation to pregnancy, visit Motherisk.org.)

Many working women, including nurses, restaurant employees, teachers and hair stylists, are on their feet a lot. That's OK to a point—being active may help prevent excess weight gain, Greenfield says. But if you're standing for long periods, wearing support hose will help prevent swelling. As your pregnancy progresses, wearing an elastic maternity support belt can help support your abdomen and redistribute weight to prevent back pain. And sit down every chance you can!

PLANNING AND PAYING FOR MATERNITY LEAVE

While nearly all countries provide nationally mandated paid parental leave, the U.S. guarantees only *unpaid* leave to employees of companies with 50 or more workers under the 1993 Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). However, you must have been with the same employer for at least one year and worked a minimum of 1,250 hours. Nearly 40 percent of the American work force is not eligible for the 12 weeks of job-protected leave.

The good news is that many companies—69 percent, according to one recent survey by the Society for Human Resource Management—offer short-term disability coverage, which pays employees a portion of their salary when they are unable to work due to a medical condition, including pregnancy. Generally, pregnant women qualify for disability leave through six weeks postpartum after a vaginal birth or eight weeks after a Cesarean section. Keep in mind

Use any extra personal time off, sick or vacation days you may have left to extend your maternity leave as long as possible.

Stay on your co-workers' good side

If you miss work often or ask for reduced duties because you don't feel well and/or have frequent doctor's appointments, being a team player when you're able can help preclude resentment from co-workers who may have to take up the slack. Many pregnant women report that building up good will—by eating lunch at your desk to get a project done, staying late or mentoring a younger colleague, for example—leads to a much more supportive workplace. "If you're a high achiever, it's easier for your manager to cut you some slack when you need it," says Kena Hudson, a public relations executive in San Francisco and the mother of a 5-month-old.

that any leave you use before delivery may diminish what you can take afterward, Greenfield advises. (See "Three Signs It's Time to Stop Working" on pg. 112.)

Some states and companies offer maternity coverage that exceeds federal requirements. Your HR department is required to give you written policies regarding maternity leave—no questions asked. However, smaller companies may not have a formal policy or necessarily be up-to-date on state laws, says Greenfield. Regardless, do some legwork to ensure you're aware of every possible benefit. Good resources include your state's department of labor and the National Partnership for Women and Families' website at nationalpartnership.org (click on "Library," then "Family Medical Leave Act").

Fortunately, partially paid parental leave is gaining momentum. California was the first to provide 55 percent of wages for six weeks to care for a newborn. Paid leave in New Jersey and Washington state is slated to begin in July, and more than 20 states have introduced similar legislation.



ACT NOW FOR AN EASIER RETURN

Although much has been made of the trend toward well-educated women dropping out of the work force after having children, a recent analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data found that fewer than 8 percent of professional women born since 1956 leave the work force for a year or more during their prime childbearing years. To smooth your return to the job:

1. **Plan for the maximum time off.** If you end up returning earlier than planned, you'll look like a hero.
2. **Leave your desk well-organized.** Your replacement should be able to access key documents easily, says Ann Douglas, author of 2002's *The* **continued on pg. 112** >>

Flexibility is in

More companies are adding parental perks, such as flexible start and end times, telecommuting and compressed work weeks, according to a recent national survey. Here are three ways to make the trend work for you:

1. **Discuss easing back in and/or aiming for a regular flexible schedule.** Your boss may fear you won't return at all, so she may be more receptive than you think to the idea. "If you've been a high-performing employee, your bargaining position is strong," says Sally Thornton, a former human resources director and president of Flexperience Consulting in San Francisco. "But don't say, 'I can only work three days a week.' Instead, focus on how a more flexible schedule will help you and the company meet specific results and potentially save costs."

2. **Consider taking your baby to work.** Yes, it really happens, and people really get work done, according to the Parenting in the Workplace Institute. More than 100 organizations allow babies in the workplace; visit babiesatwork.org to learn how to manage it successfully at your company.

3. **Check out part-time and freelance opportunities.** Several companies that match professionals with temporary, part-time and project-based job (as well as full-time) positions have sprung up in recent years. MomCorps.com, On-Ramps.com, FlexibleResources.com and FlexibleExecutives.com are just a few. Industry-specific sites, such as FlexTimeLawyers.com, Aquent (for marketing executives and designers) and HROptin.com, are another option.

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Mother of All Pregnancy Books. Also leave a memo describing the status of all your projects and a list of contacts for your substitute.

3. Don't promise to work while you're on leave. "Many women who are very career-driven are surprised to find out how tiring and all-consuming taking care of a newborn can be," says Greenfield.

As your pregnancy progresses it may help you to know that while women now are working longer into their pregnancies, employed women are actually less likely to have a pregnancy complication than their nonworking counterparts. Just remember to put yourself—and, by extension, your baby—first.

Contributing editor **Kim Schworm Acosta** lives in Overland Park, Kan., with her husband and two children. She took advantage of California's paid parental leave policy after the birth of her first child.

What if you need to change jobs?

Convinced her stressful work environment was not conducive to conceiving, public relations executive Kena Hudson quit, took a month off, then learned that she was pregnant the same day she started a new job. "Even though I wasn't feeling well, I knew I had to suck it up on my first project," she says. "I proved to them why they hired me, and then I told them I was pregnant."

Chances are, if you're miserable at work now, you're really going to hate it when you have to part from your precious baby to clock in. When job hunting, don't advertise your impending motherhood, advises New York women's rights attorney Jack Tuckner. "They can't ask about it and they can't refuse to hire you because of it," he says. "So put your best foot forward and tell them when you're ready."

Just be aware that while maternity care cannot be treated as a "pre-existing condition" by your new company's health insurance, your position won't be covered under the Family Medical Leave Act. And, of course, you risk upsetting your new boss, who may feel deceived. But who knows? It may go over better than you think. Such was the case for Hudson, who received a promotion three weeks before her due date. "It was a little awkward when I first told people," she says. "But I have no regrets."

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