



Your *back-to-work* countdown...

As your return date draws near, here's how to make the transition back to work as easy and smooth as possible

Returning to work after maternity leave can be an emotional experience for many mums. But you can minimise stress with a little planning and organisation...

Three to six months before...

Set your return date between three to six months before you want to go back. That way you'll have a fixed date to work towards and mentally prepare for.

Do this now...

Look into childcare options – talk to local working mums for recommendations and visit at least three nurseries or childminders so you can make comparisons. Read Ofsted reports (ofsted.gov.uk) and draw up a list of questions. Go back for a second visit to your preferred places, perhaps with your partner or a friend.

The month before...

Arrange a meeting or a phone chat with your boss to discuss handover plans, changes in work practice and to feel generally up to date. Meeting your maternity cover can also help with a smooth return. Phone a workmate for a catch-up if you

TOP TIP

Organise an online shopping delivery for the day before you go back and, if you can, prepare and freeze family meals in bulk. Do all the washing and ironing you'll need as a family for this first week – it'll really give you a headstart in the mornings.

haven't been in touch during your leave, and consider KIT (Keeping In Touch) days to re-familiarise yourself with your work environment.

Do this now...

Be ruthless with your working wardrobe and give anything that doesn't make you feel fabulous to charity. If you've still got some baby weight to lose, you might not be able to fit into all your old work clothes, so go shopping for a few must-haves. Have your hair cut, and make the most of this time to get on top of the less glamorous 'personal admin', like dental and eye check-ups and smear tests. You won't want to take time off work for these in the first few months back.

- Start introducing your little one to her childminder or nursery around now, to soften the settling-in process. It's also worth working out any contingency plans, sounding out friends and family about whether they would be able to help you out whenever your child is ill.

- Chat to your partner about how you'll share the load when you're

not at home full-time. Think about how you can streamline the domestic chores so you both spend more time with your baby and less time with the vacuum cleaner and duster!

The week before...

Feeling wobbly? Of course you are! You've been out of the workplace for a while now, living a completely different life. Don't worry, it will all come flooding back, and your new routine will soon feel super-familiar. Be gentle on yourself.

Do this now...

Tweak your daily routine so that the timing mirrors what's happening next week – you could even do a 'dry run' of the morning and evening schedules to give you an idea of how long everything takes. And make the most of being with your little one!

TOP TIP

Want flexible working? Employers can take up to 14 weeks to consider a flexible working request, so now is the time to get in touch. Although anyone with parental responsibility for children under the age of 17 are entitled to apply for flexible working, there is no right or entitlement to it.

The day before...

Decide what you're going to wear on your first day to keep 'dress stress' to a minimum – and choose shoes and any accessories, too.

Check your travel pass is in your handbag and/or the car has plenty of petrol. If your child is being cared for outside your home, lay out her outfit and pack her bag with everything she'll need.

Reader offer

Mothers Work! How To Get A Grip On Guilt And Make A Smooth Return To Work by Jessica Chivers is published by Hay House at £10.99.

To order a copy for £8.79 (incl p&p), visit hayhouse.co.uk or tel: 020 8962 1230 and quote 'PP07'. Offer closes 31 July 2011.

