

Publication: Practical Parenting
Date: March 2009

STRESS-FREE
GUIDE

Many happy returns

Does your stomach churn when you count the days until your maternity leave is over? Follow our easy tips to become a confident and happy working mum

Wardrobe worries

Chances are, like most mums, you won't be ready to get back into your pre-baby clothes before you go back to work. Fret not, however – you can now buy 'fourth trimester' clothes. Isabella Oliver's range has transitional maternity wear alongside nursing pieces, to make feeding as stress-free as possible and flatter any extra baby weight. "Tunic lengths, luxurious draped fabrics and flared skirts are great for this 'fourth trimester' period," say Baukjen De Swaan Arons and Vanessa Knox-Brien, co-founders of the company.

MUM'S TIP Everyone knows black is slimming, but don't limit yourself, says Sharon Hopkins, 33, from Leicestershire, mum to Harry, 11 months. "I also wear other dark colours such as navy and charcoal, and if I do wear black I try to wear a brighter accessory with it."

Never can say goodbye?

Prepare yourself, there are likely to be tears – yours and your baby's. "When I dropped Beth at nursery the first time, she cried," says mum Carly Matthews, 29, from Cardiff. "I tried to stay calm, made my goodbye short and left, although she was still crying. I felt awful, but as soon as I'd gone she settled."

EXPERT TIP To help ease your anxiety when your baby gets upset, find the best childcare you can, says Tracey Godridge, co-author of *How to Be a Great Working Mum* (Foulsham, £9.99). "Even if it means paying a bit more or travelling a bit further, if you feel confident your baby

is in a loving and secure environment, leaving her will be much easier."

Your childcare choices

Nursery, nanny or Nana? There's no easy answer – apart from the one that's right for you and your baby.

Day nurseries take babies all day and may offer early drop-offs or late pick-ups, but are expensive, often charge 'late' fees and won't take your child if he's ill. To help with the cost, see if you're entitled to childcare vouchers at www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/childcare.

With a nanny, your baby is in the comfort and security of his own home and has loads of one-to-one attention. The downside is it can be costly, plus you need to find someone you can trust completely. Grandparents will often help out, but while they may do it for love rather than money, it's important to be sure they're capable and happy to do it.

MUM'S TIP "I thought Jamie was best suited to a nursery – I like the fact he has other children to play with and his own keyworker taking a special interest in him," says Claire Pomfret, 33, from Manchester, mum to Jamie, almost 1.

Arrive with confidence

"Use the 10 'keep in touch days' offered by the Government", says Victoria Legg, 29, from Suffolk, mum to Freya, 1. "These were great for breaking me in gently, as I was an extra member of staff so I could catch up at my own pace." When you go back, trust your choices – your confidence won't improve if you continually seek colleagues' approval.

EXPERT TIP Gillian Nissim, founder of www.workingmums.co.uk, says, "Going on a refresher course – to brush up your IT skills, for example – can give you a great confidence boost, and talking to friends who've already gone back to work can provide lots of reassurance."

Say hi to your new role

Talk to your employer about what options are available, such as flexible working, before you return. While going part-time or job sharing

"It takes 4 weeks to earn what used to take a week"



"I went back to work on location for a TV company when Alice was 4 months. I made it through my first 10-week job, but it

was very stressful. I expressed day and night and travelled home at ridiculous times.

"I had Sam when Alice was 2, and I now work 9am to 5.30pm, near home. It takes four weeks to earn what I used to earn in a week, but the time I spend with my children more than makes up for it."

Helen Ostler, 36, from East Sussex, mum to Alice, 2, and Sam, 1.