

Workplace breastfeeding support



1 in 3 people globally suffer from at least one type of malnutrition: this brings significant losses in productivity and potential, and poses challenges to employers in both high-and-low income settings.¹ Given that 58% of the world's population will spend one third of their time at work during their adult life, occupational health is a critical determinant of overall wellbeing.² The workplace - whether in urban or rural, high-or-low income, corporate or supply chains - offers unique opportunities to address malnutrition.

In this series, GAIN outlines the evidence for the 4 most common workforce nutrition interventions.

This evidence brief focuses on workplace breastfeeding support programmes, providing a review of the evidence for impact, best practice and case studies.



Healthy food at work



Nutrition education



Nutrition-focused health checks



Breastfeeding support

Definition of 'workplace breastfeeding support' interventions

Workplace breastfeeding support includes programmes or company policies which enable working mothers to breastfeed exclusively for 6 months and continually up to 2 years. Such programmes can include: respecting or exceeding national laws on duration of paid maternity leave (ensuring 6 months minimum); providing an appropriate place and time to express/pump milk during work hours and providing options for working mothers such as on-site child care and flexible work schedules. Some programmes include awareness-raising or nutrition education campaigns for mothers and co-workers on the importance of breastfeeding.



Evidence of impact

The programmatic evidence on the impact of workplace breastfeeding support is robust. A recent systematic review of 22 programmes in 9 countries found that a dedicated breastfeeding space at work significantly increases breastfeeding duration and exclusivity.¹ This study also found that breastfeeding rooms were more important than dedicated breaks in prolonging breastfeeding.¹

Furthermore, several studies show benefits beyond the nutritional advantages for the infant, such as improved productivity and reduced absenteeism in working mothers, and decreased healthcare costs and employee turnover.²⁻⁴ Indeed, there is substantial evidence to suggest that breastfeeding reduces absenteeism in employees who are parents because their infants are ill less often.⁵ This translates into substantial return on investment for business. The U.S. Breastfeeding Committee reports that for every USD 1 invested to support breastfeeding, employers realize a cost saving of EUR 3.⁵



Best practices

- Dedicated spaces and refrigerators reserved for pumping and storing breastmilk, respectively.
- Break times for breastfeeding.
- Raising awareness in all staff.⁶
- Providing breastfeeding support services to help mothers who are having difficulties continuing to breastfeed.



Direct success metrics

- Increased availability of an adequate breastfeeding space and breaks.
- Extended duration of breastfeeding among working mothers.
- Increased rates of exclusive breastfeeding among working mothers.

Company examples (self-reported)

Kohsei Multipak Viet Nam Company Ltd implemented a workplace breastfeeding support policy in 2014 with technical and financial support from Alive & Thrive. They provided breastfeeding rooms, nutrition support to employees, protein-rich lunches and milk fortnightly. They also allowed pregnant women to eat their own nutritious foods during work hours. *Kohsei's* managing director recognized that investing in healthy babies is investing in a healthy future workforce by declaring "We welcome your next generation to work for the *Kohsei* family" (p.13).⁷

Further information

For further information about the workforce nutrition programme, please visit www.gainhealth.org.

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