

Combining Multiple Pregnancy and Employment



Many women have concerns and questions about pregnancy and their jobs. And, there are many aspects of multiple pregnancy that can complicate the pregnancy/job combination. Just as each pregnancy is different, employers are different; some women will find support and encouragement, others will find many stumbling blocks. Here are some ideas on ways to communicate your health needs to your supervisor and your employment needs to your doctor.

1. Think realistically and truthfully about your job and its physical and emotional demands. Obvious physical demands are: standing for long periods of time, long commutes, heavy lifting, frequent bending, or other physical tasks, and exposure to toxic agents or chemicals. Questions to ask yourself include: Is your job stressful and/or fatiguing? Do you have the time to use the restroom, take breaks, eat meals and snacks as well as drink water throughout the day? Is your employment hazardous in any way? Do you work outdoors, overheated on your job, or have to do a lot of walking? How far are you from the bathroom, water and dining facilities? Are you required to travel by plane or car a great deal? Share your answers with your physician/nurse midwife and listen to the recommendations they provide.
2. Consider how your employer has handled other pregnant employees in the past. What usual maternity benefits are offered by your company? Are you allowed to combine saved vacation days with sick pay? What is your relationship with your company and supervisor? Are you known to be a team player or someone who abused sick time and was frequently late? Have you taken off a great deal of time in the past year already? These are important things to consider when approaching your supervisor and planning your leave from your company.
3. Meet with your employer early in your pregnancy to talk about your job. Discuss the higher risks with a multiple pregnancy and the possibility of needing time off work because of complications. Ask your employer about making temporary modifications to your job: can you take on more phone work, work the cash register rather than wait tables, or turn traveling over to a colleague temporarily? Be honest about what your limitations eventually may be. Do not try to minimize your needs now and then have to ask to change duties again later. Can you work from home several days a week or is telecommuting possible with your position? Is there someone who may want to job-share with you? Can you use flex time to avoid rush hour?
4. Inquire about maternity leave and disability with the Human Resources/Personnel representative. It is important to know what your disability plan is and if it covers a high-risk pregnancy. Know ahead of time what forms you may need to have filled out by your doctor. Inquire about the Family Leave Act and find out if you or your spouse qualifies. Ask how long your position would be held if you had to leave work early in your pregnancy. What kind of documentation do you need from your physician?
5. Be realistic with your employer how much maternity leave you plan to take, and when you plan to return to work. Remember that many multiples are born

prematurely and may need to stay in the hospital for several days or weeks. Think about returning to work slowly by telecommuting or part-time work. If you do not plan to return to work, do not wait until the last minute to tell your employer. If you have the luxury of not working at all, this should be an option to consider. Although the exact limits must be individualized with your doctor, women with uncomplicated twin pregnancies should plan to leave work or cut down on their hours somewhere around 24-28 weeks of pregnancy. Women with complications or higher-order pregnancies may need to leave work much sooner, as early as 20 weeks. You may want to cancel any previous requested time off to allow other employees to plan their vacations before you go on maternity leave. This is very important in a small company when only one person is able to leave at a time.

6. If you are put on early bed rest, think about ways you could continue to contribute to your job. Can you have work faxed or sent via e-mail? Can you manage a project from your bedroom, can you help your replacement with daily phone conferences? Keeping in touch with your office is a good way to remind your employer of your value. Can you "attend" meetings via speaker phone? One woman on early bedrest "attended" meetings via speaker phone. However, she had a life-size poster of herself placed in her regular chair as a visual reminder to her co-workers of who she was.
7. Modify your work area as much as possible. Arrange items to reduce bending and stretching. Take frequent stretch breaks, and get fresh air on your break. Carry a small cooler for your snacks and a large insulated container for water. Use a stool or box under your desk for your feet and a small pillow behind your back. Carry a healthy lunch and snacks to work and avoid unhealthy choices in your cafeteria.
8. If you usually wear a uniform or have a specific dress code, continue to stay in dress code. This helps show your employer that you are serious about your job. Order a maternity uniform, or shop for business maternity clothes. Just because you are pregnant does not mean you can suddenly wear a T-shirt with jeans when everyone else is wearing a suit.
9. If you plan on returning to work after your babies are born, keep up with trade journals and reports as much as possible. You may not have much time once the babies arrive, but staying on top of current events and trends in your field will make the transition back to work a smooth one.
10. Finally, keep your priorities in check by making sure the important things come first. It isn't worth compromising the health of your babies for a few extra dollars.