Lactation spaces are 'a need – not a luxury'

University Communications
September 2023

This is the third in an occasional series of articles that follows the writer along on her journey to parenthood. In her first story, Mikayla explained how to navigate the new parental leave policy. In her second story, she collected advice from faculty and staff colleagues about how to manage parenthood and work. In this story, Kelley – whose son was born in January – talks about the spaces on campus designed to make breast-feeding and pumping more convenient and comfortable.

Have ideas for future stories? Please email them to mikaylamace@arizona.edu.

The very first thing I do every morning is pull my baby onto my lap and nurse him. Throughout the day, I usually feed or pump another three or four times. The last thing I do every night before turning off the lamp is pump one last time so that I can comfortably sleep through the night.

For months, my days have begun, ended and revolved around expressing milk. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends I do this for up to two years.

Not only is this routine involved, it's also necessary to maintain an adequate milk supply. If I wait too long between sessions – which can easily happen with back-to-back meetings – my body interprets that to mean my baby is being weaned and will produce less milk. To prevent this, I live my life in 3 1/2-hour increments, scheduling my daily pump sessions in my Outlook calendar and mapping out where on campus I might pump.

I work in the Louise Foucar Marshall Building and take a short walk to the University Services Building about a block away to use a Mamava lactation pod, a small space with a locked door, power supply bench and tabletop. It allows me privacy, dimmable lights, a power source for my pump and a surface for my pumping supplies.

This is just one of the 27 locations on main campus – with 10 other University locations around the state – that can be used to pump or nurse. To accommodate all lactating caregivers working or studying at the University, the Office of University Initiatives and Life & Work Connections established 11 new lactation spaces on main campus and five new spaces at other locations over the last year.

Proposals for new spaces were accepted beginning in January 2022 and were decided by April 2022. The new lactation spaces were either renovations of existing spaces, such as unused offices, storage rooms or study spaces, or the addition of a Mamava lactation pod. All new spaces are accessible per the Americans With Disabilities Act.

"The goal was to fill gaps between existing spaces so that locations are ideally less than a five-minute walk away and make additions in places with high traffic flow," said Lori Van Buggenum, project director for the Office of University Initiatives, who co-led the effort to add more spaces.

An important part of this process was bringing together a committee of diverse stakeholders – including parents, faculty members and subject matter experts, as well as representation from Life & Work Connections, Women and Gender Resources, Facilities Management, the Disability Resource Center and Planning, Design and Construction.

You can find the locations with the Family Resources Map. Lourdes Rodriguez, manager of childcare and family resources with Life & Work Connections, can also provide guidance for units and departments that want to develop new lactation spaces, Van Buggenum said.

When nursing parents and caregivers go without dedicated space, they are left to pump in bathrooms, cars or rooms without locks, said Amy Glicken, senior project director for the Office of University Initiatives and initiative co-lead.

"While pumping, you’re often sitting for 20, 30, 40 minutes. You need an electrical outlet, you need a comfortable place to sit, and you need to be relaxed to let your milk come in," Glicken said.

Many people, myself included before I became pregnant, don't realize that lactation is a physical and chemical dance. Babies – and the pumps that mimic them – usually begin with quick, shallow suction that sends a message to the brain to start producing the hormones prolactin and oxytocin. These hormones signal the body to make more milk and encourage the release of milk, respectively, according to the National Institutes of Health. This is called the let-down reflex, and it's at this point that suction can slow and intensify and milk most easily flows.

This process can be disturbed if someone is uncomfortable or stressed. So, while federal law requires only a chair and work surface within a lactation space, creating an intentional environment can positively impact the quality and efficiency
of milk expression, Glicken said.

"In the renovated rooms, we encouraged places with comfortable chairs, artwork, dimmable lights and maybe a sound machine," Glicken said. Additional recommended items include a trash can, disinfectant wipes or spray, paper towels, hooks for coats and bags, and a mirror, according to Life & Work Connections. "The goal was to really make these spaces feel more welcoming for pumping or nursing parents."

These recommended additions come down to living the University's institutional values, Van Buggenum said.

"We want to be a great place to work, learn and flourish," she said. "Having lactation spaces is a need – not a luxury – that we have to thoughtfully build our environment around. It needs to be a quiet, secure place where you can relax and let your body do what it needs to do."

Federal law mandates that employers allow parents time and space (that is not a bathroom) to pump at work for up to one year after the birth of a child.

To use a Mamava pod, you must download this app[12].

Contacts for issues related to lactation rooms

- For cleaning and maintenance, call Facilities Management Custodial Services at 520-621-7558.
- For cleaning funds, call Facilities Management business services at 520-626-1244.
- For signs, call Facilities Management paint/sign shop at 520-621-7310.
  - Temporary free signs are available for download[13].
- To report changes and updates, or request a lactation space consultation, contact contact Life & Work Connections online[14] or call 520-621-2493.

Additional information

- Learn more about lactation spaces at University Libraries[15]
- What to Know about Lactation Rooms: For Building Managers[16]
- Establishing a Lactation Space[14]

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