Your maternity leave, pay and other rights

You have the right to up to 52 weeks’ maternity leave if you’re having a baby and are legally classed as an employee.

You have this right from your first day of starting a job.

After the first compulsory 2 or 4 weeks, how many of the 52 weeks you take is up to you.

You get the same amount of maternity leave and pay even if you have more than one baby, for example twins.

1. Maternity pay

You might be entitled to maternity pay when you take maternity leave.

Find out about maternity pay.

Shared Parental Leave

If you have a partner, you might be able to use Shared Parental Leave (SPL). This means you end your maternity leave early and what’s left of your entitlement can be used more flexibly between you and your partner.

You must still take a minimum of 2 weeks’ maternity leave (4 weeks if you do factory work) after your baby’s born.

You can decide to take SPL after you have started maternity leave, but it’s best to plan it and let your employer know as early as possible.

Find out more about Shared Parental Leave.

Agency, freelance, self-employed and zero-hours workers

You must still stop work for a minimum of 2 weeks (4 weeks if you do factory work) after giving birth if you’re:

- employed through an agency
- freelance
- self-employed
- on a zero-hours contract

You can choose to take more time off to look after your baby.
If you work through an agency, you need to tell them the dates you’ll be off. You might be entitled to maternity pay for this time off.

Find out more about your employment rights.

**Dismissal during pregnancy or maternity**

You’re protected by law against unfair treatment and dismissal if it’s because of your pregnancy and maternity, no matter how long you’ve worked for your employer.

This means if you’re dismissed while pregnant or on maternity leave, your employer must put the reason for your dismissal in writing.

If your dismissal can be linked to your pregnancy or maternity, you could claim unfair dismissal and discrimination at an employment tribunal. It’s usually best to raise the issue with your employer.

Find out more about dismissals.