

Chapter 16

Uniform Issues

Breastfeeding in Uniform

There may be times when you will need to breastfeed in uniform, such as at a doctor's visit or during a lunch break at the CDC. What are you to do? There are no regulations within any of the services that specifically approve or deny a breastfeeding mother from nursing her baby while in uniform. However, there are differing opinions, even from service members themselves, as to whether or not it is appropriate to do so. The question and answer lies in defining what constitutes a "proud and professional appearance that will reflect positively on the individual, the (Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, Navy), and the United States."

Does having a baby at the breast, even one that is covered, reflect positively on the Armed Forces? Do you promote a professional appearance while nursing your baby? It is a tough call to make for the nursing mother and her superiors. While some will argue that a baby needs to be fed, and as long as it is done discreetly (who defines discreet?), there should be no problem. Others will say that breastfeeding a baby in uniform is completely unprofessional and reflects poorly on the Armed Forces. As this Navy lieutenant states:

Given that we are instructed that holding our children while in uniform is not maintaining a professional appearance, I never thought that breastfeeding my child while in uniform would be allowed. I have, but ONLY in my home returning from work and in the doctor's office in the private room (not waiting area). Petty Officer 2nd Class, USN

This is one area where you will need to tread carefully and realize that while your command and direct supervisor may have no problem with it, someone at Medical or over at the CDC may decide to counsel you. Until there is a written regulation about breastfeeding in uniform, it is very much on a case-by-case basis. Be prepared to hear everything from "it's OK" to "not at my command," and have another way to feed or place to go to with your baby should you be told to stop breastfeeding in uniform.

There are a few things to keep in mind if you do decide to breastfeed in uniform. Unlike in civilian clothes where you can wear a sling or be a little more revealing, while in uniform you must maintain a military appearance and remain in uniform at all times. That pretty much means no slings or

fancy blankets and definitely no skin showing. Practice, practice, practice latching your baby so that you can get him latched on as quickly as possible and with as little skin showing as possible. Depending on the uniform you are wearing, this may be next to impossible or fairly easy to accomplish. For the most part, uniforms that have untucked blouses that can be pulled up from the waist or that unbutton in the front are the best for easy access without having to undress completely.

Mothers in all the services agree that “cammies” (ACUs, ABUs, NWUs, etc.) are by far the easiest to breastfeed in, while any one-piece type uniform, like a flight suit or one with a blouse that remains tucked in, is either impossible to nurse in, or looks very unprofessional and out-of-uniform when untucked.

If you have a uniform that comes with an over blouse or jacket worn over a t-shirt or blouse, you may find it easier to breastfeed, since the jacket hides any skin showing on the sides. Just like with civilian clothing, unbuttoning from the bottom of the shirt is less revealing than from the top down. If you would feel more comfortable, you can use a subdued, solid colored blanket, nursing cape, or burp rag to cover yourself and your baby. Bear in mind though, that a blanket or nursing cape isn’t part of your uniform and doesn’t exactly project a professional military appearance either. Besides, not too many babies like eating under a blanket. Ultimately, you’ll have to decide what you are comfortable with and what your command will allow.

I feed my baby in uniform if I need to, but it depends on what uniform I’m wearing. I would never do it in my blues because I can’t do it discreetly. I do in my flightsuit because I can just unzip it a bit and pull my shirt up. Major, USAF



Breastfeeding in Navy NWUs

*Photo courtesy Abigail Rees.
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Pumping in Uniform

Pumping in uniform is very similar to breastfeeding in uniform, with the exception that you will be alone in a private area where you can undress further and not risk getting in trouble. While you are restricted to the uniforms

prescribed by your command and the type of work you perform, uniforms that unbutton or unzip in the front or can be pulled up from the waist are the best for easy access without having to undress completely every time you need to pump. Much like breastfeeding in uniform, mothers who pump say that the cammies are the easiest to pump in, as they can unbutton the over blouse and pull up the t-shirt and pump away. Mothers who wear coveralls or flight suits generally unzip and tie the upper part around their waist before pumping. It is a good idea to consider keeping an extra set of uniforms at work for unexpected leaks and spills.

I haven't had any problems pumping in uniform. Nursing is a hassle though because of the Velcro. Evidently, the uniform conceals the pumping very well, as two male coworkers walked into my office this week and took a while to realize what I was doing. One took about a minute, then he apologized and left. The other one took a bit longer, apologized, realized I wasn't bothered by it, and continued what he needed me to do. Go ACUs!!! Captain, USA

To control leaking while in uniform, invest in some nursing pads. You will probably only need them for the first few weeks back at work (although a few lucky women need them throughout their nursing career). There are various types of pads available: cotton and wool pads are very absorbent and reusable but bulky; while disposable nursing pads are thinner, but may have a plastic backing and cost money over the long haul. Both types of pads will need to be changed frequently to prevent sore nipples or thrush. There is another type



Lily Padz silicone breast pads

*Photo courtesy Robyn Roche-Paull.
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of pad, Lily Padz©, that is made of thin silicone that prevents leaking by applying pressure to the nipple. They are reusable and are suitable for times when you know you won't be able to pump for an extended period of time and cannot have any leaking or bulky pads show through, such as during a ceremony, uniform inspection, or a long flight (see Appendix B for resources). They are also good for swimming and will keep your nipples from showing through a thin shirt or

blouse if you have particularly perky nipples. They are not meant for everyday wear, however, and you should remain vigilant about plugged ducts and mastitis while using them, and if you will be going for an extended period of time without nursing or pumping.