

# What to Expect at Work When You're Expecting

Gay, Roxane . New York Times , Late Edition (East Coast); New York, N.Y. [New York, N.Y]. 07 Nov 2021: BU.4.

[ProQuest document link](#)

---

## FULL TEXT

Send questions about the office, money, careers and work-life balance to [workfriend@nytimes.com](mailto:workfriend@nytimes.com) . Include your name and location, or a request to remain anonymous. Letters may be edited.

Every week, I am asked all kinds of questions about how to navigate the workplace while pregnant. It's a stark reminder that there are few protections in place for people who want to pursue biological parenthood while satisfying their professional ambitions. Theoretically, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, an amendment to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, protects our reproductive rights in the workplace. But there is a wide and precarious gulf between the law and how employers actually treat pregnant people. Our elected leaders, many of whom extol the virtues of family, can't even agree on making paid parental leave law.

A great many women spend an undue amount of time worrying about pregnancy and their professional prospects. They stress over when to share news of their pregnancy and how it will affect their employment. They work through morning sickness and other ailments associated with pregnancy, worrying that they need to muscle through without recourse.

Women of a certain age are often considered "pre-pregnant" -- or likely to become pregnant -- which factors into hiring and promotion decisions. It shouldn't, but it does. Sometimes women get a new job without knowing they're pregnant, and then worry about what their new employer may think when the pregnancy comes to light. If a company offers parental leave, and that is a mighty big if, there are few guarantees that someone's position will be held for them. When employees do return to the workplace, they can be irrevocably thrown off their career track. Their job, or something equivalent, should be waiting for them but sometimes, it simply isn't.

Once an employee becomes a parent, there is little workplace support for child care issues. Many employers don't have lactation rooms, nor do they offer the scheduling flexibility so many parents very much need. What should be a joyful experience becomes incredibly fraught. People are forced to decide what they want more -- family or career -- when in a just society, this impossible choice would not be necessary.

When Do I Tell?

I'm 13 weeks pregnant and recently started a new job. I found out after I accepted the offer. In a perfect world, I wouldn't have chosen to be at a new job while feeling sick every day, but here we are. I've been advised by many people to not disclose my pregnancy until my probation period is up, but at that point I'll be giving only three months' notice for my maternity leave, vs. five months if I give notice now. I'm worried about being hated either way. I do not live in the United States and women here almost always take a year off for maternity leave, so this isn't a short-term replacement. When do I tell my new bosses I'm pregnant?

-- Kate, Toronto

There are lots of opinions about when to disclose a pregnancy to an employer. There are also a lot of factors to consider. Is your employer family friendly? Will the work you do affect your pregnancy? Do you need accommodations? Do you intend to return to your employer after your parental leave? Do you need to have a postpartum plan in place so your responsibilities are covered? Will your disclosure affect any upcoming performance reviews? It's ridiculous that some of these factors need to be considered, but they do. You are clearly conscientious and want to do the "right thing," but so long as you give notice, I don't think there is a wrong choice. I

am sure your employer would prefer five rather than three months, but three months is still quite a lot of time for your supervisors to find someone to fill your position while you are on leave. Congratulations on both the job and the pregnancy. Tell your new bosses you're pregnant when you're ready, but do give them at least those three months.

#### What About When I Feel Sick?

I'm currently pregnant with my first child and in my first trimester. It's been a joyous time, but I'm struggling with extreme fatigue and morning sickness. I work at a fintech firm that's very fast-paced and young. I'm 30 and pretty much the oldest person on my team, and no one else has a child. Working 55+ hours per week was acceptable before I got pregnant, but now it's draining.

I know the convention is to keep your pregnancy under wraps until you're in your second trimester, but I'm wondering if it's something I should share with my manager now. I hope the team can understand if I'm not able to work at the same capacity as before. At the same time, I don't want to come off as someone who's asking for special treatment. My job is important to me, and I'm afraid I'll be taken less seriously after I share this news. What should I do?

– Anonymous

Receiving accommodations for pregnancy is not special treatment. It is the bare minimum that should be done if an employer is fostering a family friendly workplace. You can still do your fair share without working unreasonable hours that no one should have to work. If you have a good relationship with your manager and it won't jeopardize your position, yes, do share your pregnancy at your earliest convenience. Talk with your manager about reasonable expectations for your performance as well as how to cover any responsibilities you are unable to fulfill before and after giving birth. Regardless of how you approach this, remember that you are not a problem. You are not creating a problem. You have every right to have a child and a career.

#### What If I Want a New Job?

I have been miserable at my job for the last few years and am aggressively searching for a new job. This week, I learned I am pregnant. Along with the thrill and excitement, I now feel an immense pressure to lock down a new job immediately for fear that otherwise, I will have no choice but to remain in my current role for a year or more. Am I putting this pressure on myself unnecessarily? What are the ethics around applying for a new job while pregnant? How late in my pregnancy would it be reasonable or fair to an employer to assume a new position knowing I would have to take maternity leave in some months? At what stage should I feel morally obligated to disclose a pregnancy to a future employer, especially while interviews take place over Zoom, so my body would not be visible? I am overjoyed by the prospect of being a mother, but I am overwhelmed by the prospect of my condition limiting my work options.

– Anonymous

There is nothing unethical about looking for a job while pregnant. A pregnancy you are embracing is not a problem. It should not be treated as such. You have as much right as anyone to look for new employment and you are legally protected from pregnancy discrimination in the hiring process. You cannot be unfair to an employer because a company is not a person. It is not your job to be fair to it. Being pregnant and taking a job at a company is not unfair in any way and any employer who would make you feel that way is a lousy employer. I strongly encourage you to stop putting this much pressure on yourself. Start looking for new work. If you are more than six months pregnant, yes, disclose your pregnancy so they know that, practically, you're looking for a job you would begin in earnest after your parental leave. Other than that, it is not something you need to share until you are ready and willing to do so. I wish you the best in all things pregnancy-related as well as in your job search.

Roxane Gay is the author, most recently, of "Hunger" and a contributing opinion writer. Write to her at [workfriend@nytimes.com](mailto:workfriend@nytimes.com).

#### Photograph

(PHOTOGRAPH BY Margeaux Walter for The New York Times FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

## DETAILS

<b>Subject:</b>	Pregnancy; Family leave; Careers; Employers; Maternity &paternity leaves; Employment
<b>Business indexing term:</b>	Subject: Family leave Careers Employers Maternity &paternity leaves Employment
<b>URL:</b>	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/05/business/what-to-think-at-work-when-youre-expecting.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/05/business/what-to-think-at-work-when-youre-expecting.html</a>
<b>Publication title:</b>	New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast); New York, N.Y.
<b>Pages:</b>	BU.4
<b>Publication year:</b>	2021
<b>Publication date:</b>	Nov 7, 2021
<b>column:</b>	Work Friend
<b>Section:</b>	BU
<b>Publisher:</b>	New York Times Company
<b>Place of publication:</b>	New York, N.Y.
<b>Country of publication:</b>	United States, New York, N.Y.
<b>Publication subject:</b>	General Interest Periodicals--United States
<b>ISSN:</b>	03624331
<b>Source type:</b>	Newspaper
<b>Language of publication:</b>	English
<b>Document type:</b>	News
<b>ProQuest document ID:</b>	2593967202
<b>Document URL:</b>	<a href="https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/what-expect-at-work-when-youre-expecting/docview/2593967202/se-2?accountid=44910">https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/what-expect-at-work-when-youre-expecting/docview/2593967202/se-2?accountid=44910</a>
<b>Copyright:</b>	Copyright New York Times Company Nov 7, 2021
<b>Last updated:</b>	2021-11-07
<b>Database:</b>	U.S. Major Dailies

Database copyright © 2021 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

[Terms and Conditions](#) [Contact ProQuest](#)