

Washington Guidelines for Drafting Work Accommodation Notes for Pregnant and Postpartum Patients

*These guidelines **apply only in Washington.**

Visit [the Pregnant@Work website](http://www.pregnantatwork.org) (www.pregnantatwork.org) for other states.

ACOG's Committee Opinion on Employment Considerations (#733) recommends that obstetric care providers assist their patients to obtain accommodations by writing appropriate notes to employers following these state-specific guidelines.

Attached as Appendix A is a sample work note that satisfies the requirements under Washington law.

Washington law¹ requires employers of 15 or more employees to provide:

- **reasonable accommodations** for an employee's pregnancy or pregnancy-related health conditions;
- unless the employer can demonstrate that doing so would impose an **undue hardship** on the employer's program, enterprise, or business.

Health care providers can play an important role in enabling patients to receive the accommodations they need to keep their jobs.

In most cases, the goal is to write a note that will assist your patient to receive the accommodation she needs to continue working and earning an income for the family she supports. Before you recommend that a patient take leave or adopt a reduced schedule, see "Caution: Recommending Leave" and "Recommending a Reduced Schedule" under #4 below.

For patients requiring **lactation accommodations** (e.g., breaks and space for pumping breast milk), review our separate guidelines for writing effective lactation accommodation notes at [the Pregnant@Work website's page for Helping Patients Seek Breastfeeding Accommodations](#).

An effective pregnancy or postpartum accommodation work note has five components:

- 1. State that your patient is pregnant or postpartum.** This triggers the protections of the federal and Washington laws that may require your patient's employer to accommodate her.
- 2. Precisely identify your patient's limitation(s).** Identify exactly what your patient requires to work safely. Do not impose limitations that are not necessary, because if there is no accommodation available, your patient could be sent out on leave.

Examples of specific, clear limitations include:

- Is unable to stand for more than one hour without fifteen minutes of sitting
- Must eat snacks every two or three hours throughout the day

¹ Wash. Rev. Code § 43.10.005.

- May not lift more than 50 pounds more than three times per day
- Must consume water approximately every 10 minutes throughout the day
- May not be exposed to [specific toxin]
- May not be put at risk of being kicked in the stomach
- May not climb ladders

CAUTION: Avoid recommending limitations that are too vague or overly broad. For example, **DO NOT recommend:**

- “Light duty.” Instead, specify the maximum number of pounds the patient can safely lift, that she can only be on her feet X amount without a rest break, etc.
- “No stress.” This typically will cause a patient to lose her job. What employer can guarantee a stress-free job?
- “No physical activity.” Be more specific; few jobs require no physical activity at all.

3. Affirmatively state that your patient is able to continue working with a reasonable accommodation. Under Washington law, an employer may not require that a pregnant or postpartum woman take leave if another reasonable accommodation can be provided instead. Omit this step if you are recommending full-time leave.

4. Recommend reasonable accommodation(s). Patients typically have a better chance of receiving the accommodations they need if their health care provider identifies them. Under Washington law, an employer may request a written certification from the employee’s health care provider regarding the *need* for reasonable accommodation, except when the employee is requesting: (1) more frequent, longer, or flexible restroom breaks; (2) modification to a no food or drink policy; (3) seating or to be allowed to sit more frequently; or for (4) lifting limits of over 17 pounds.

- A *reasonable accommodation* is any change in the work environment or in the way a job is customarily done that would address the employee’s limitation related to pregnancy or a pregnancy-related health condition, without imposing an undue difficulty or expense on her employer. Speak with your patient about what may be possible at her workplace.
- **Caution: Recommending leave.** Your patient should consider two factors before taking leave. First, *leave is often unpaid*. Second, most employees have limited leave time, or no leave time. If your patient exhausts her leave before she is able to return to work, she may be fired.
 - During Pregnancy: Before recommending that your patient take leave during pregnancy, consider that if she goes out early in her pregnancy, *she may exhaust her leave* and have none available during the final weeks of pregnancy and following childbirth. You should discuss with your patient other accommodations that will allow her to continue working.
 - Postpartum: Your patient may be entitled to take leave following childbirth for recovery and bonding with her newborn. She may also be entitled to take leave for postpartum pregnancy-related conditions (e.g.,

depression or anxiety). To learn about the laws that may provide your patient a right to take leave postpartum, visit [the Babygate website](#).

- **Caution: Recommending a reduced schedule:** A woman whose health care provider recommends a reduced schedule (e.g., part time work) typically uses up her leave on a pro rata basis.
- **If your patient is fired for taking leave or unsure about her leave eligibility,** advise her to contact WorkLife Law’s free legal hotline without delay (see below).

***Appendix B** to this document is a chart of typical pregnancy-related conditions and accommodations that may be appropriate in addressing them.

Examples of reasonable accommodations include:

- Providing more frequent, longer, or flexible restroom breaks
- Modifying a no food or drink policy
- Job restructuring, part-time or modified work schedules, reassignment to a vacant position, or acquiring or modifying equipment, devices, or an employee’s workstation
- Providing seating or allowing the employee to sit more frequently if her job requires her to stand
- Providing for a temporary transfer to a less strenuous or less hazardous position
- Providing assistance with manual labor and limits on lifting
- Scheduling flexibility for prenatal visits

- 5. Provide expected duration of limitation.** Inform the employer how long you expect the limitation to last. Say, for example, that the limitation began on the date of the letter and is expected to last for the duration of your patient’s pregnancy, until she gives birth on her approximate due date. If the end date of the accommodation is uncertain, you may choose to list a date by which you will reevaluate your patient – the date can be extended or changed in the future. *If you say nothing at all about when a patient on leave can return to work, she may end up losing her job as a result.*

Have Questions? Health care providers may contact the Center for WorkLife Law at (415)-565-4640. Pregnant women may contact WorkLife Law’s free legal hotline at hotline@worklifelaw.org or (415) 703-8276. WorkLife Law experts are available to deliver grand rounds or are available for other educational opportunities on this topic.

Visit [the Pregnant@Work website](http://www.pregnantatwork.org) (www.pregnantatwork.org) for more info or to draft a work accommodation note using our interactive note-writing tool.

Attached as Appendix A is a sample work note that maximizes the likelihood that your patient will receive the accommodation she needs.

Thank you for your work and commitment to your patients.

Appendix A

Washington: Sample Pregnancy or Postpartum Accommodation Work Letter

Health Care Provider's Letterhead

[Date]

To Whom It May Concern:

I am the **[treating physician, nurse practitioner, health care professional, etc.]** for **[Patient]**.

[Patient] requires a reasonable accommodation because of **[choose: pregnancy, childbirth, a health condition related to pregnancy]**. Specifically, she **[state limitation here, e.g., "cannot stand for more than an hour without 15 minutes of sitting," "must take breaks every 3-4 hours to eat a snack," etc.¹]**.

[Patient] is able to continue working with a reasonable accommodation.

Optional: I suggest **[Patient]** be provided the following accommodation: **[Describe suggested accommodation(s) here²]**.

The need for accommodation began on **[Date]**. At this time, I anticipate that **[Patient]** will need an accommodation until **[state estimated end date of limitation/accommodation³]**.

Thank you.

Signature

¹ See guidelines document, component #2.

² See guidelines document, component #4.

³ See guidelines document, component #5.

Washington Guidelines: Drafting Work Accommodation Notes for Pregnant Women

Suggested Reasonable Accommodations

Condition	Potential Reasonable Accommodations
Abnormal placentation (placenta accreta, placenta percreta, placenta increta, placenta previa, vasa previa)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time off for medical appointments • Provide scheduling changes such as flexible schedules or telework (which may include a temporary transfer to a position that provides this kind of flexibility) • Allow assistance from coworkers with lifting • Provide assistive equipment to lift more than X pounds • Temporarily modify particular duties of the job • Move workstation close to restrooms
Anemia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow sitting while working • Allow assistance from coworkers in lifting • Allow breaks every 4 to 6 hours
Bladder dysfunction (urinary incontinence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow more frequent bathroom breaks as needed
Carpal tunnel syndrome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow occasional breaks from manual tasks or typing – state how frequently (e.g. every two hours or “as needed”) • Provide specialized programs that allow for dictation instead of typing • Provide ergonomic support for hands and wrists • Allow wearing of wrist brace
Cesarean incision infection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>See wound complications</i>
Cholestasis of pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time off from work twice weekly for medical appointments • Allow to take medication
Deep vein thrombosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow frequent (hourly) breaks to stretch and move extremities • Allow refrigerator for storage and privacy for injections • Modification of workstation to allow for more comfortable movement of legs • Allow teleconferencing rather than travel to avoid risks associated with travel

Depression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide time off for employee to participate in therapeutic sessions • Temporarily transfer employee to a less distracting environment • Allow telecommuting (which may include temporary transfer to a position that allows for telecommuting)
Diabetes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time off for medical appointments • Permit employee to take more frequent bathroom breaks and to eat small snacks during work hours – be specific with regard to timing, if possible (e.g., approximately every two hours, or “as necessary”) • Allow breaks and a private location for testing blood glucose – before and/or after each meal • Provide space for medications to be stored • Allow scheduling changes such as flexible schedules or telework (which may include a temporary transfer to a position that provides this kind of flexibility)
Dyspnea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide employee with stool or chair to sit on while working • Provide assistive equipment for lifting • Allow coworker assistance with lifting • Temporarily modify particular duties of the job
Fatigue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporarily modify job duties to avoid strenuous activity • Allow scheduling changes such as flexible schedules or telework (which may include a temporary transfer to a position that provides this kind of flexibility) • Exemption from mandatory overtime
Gastroesophageal reflux (GERD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow breaks for food – be specific as to timing (e.g., approximately every two hours, or “as necessary”) • Provide space for medications to be stored
Hyperemesis gravidarum (morning sickness)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow employee to take more frequent bathroom breaks • Allow employee to eat small snacks during work hours • Provide a cot for lying down and take breaks as needed • Provide schedule changes such as flexible schedules or telework (which may include a temporary transfer to a position that provides this kind of flexibility)
Hypertension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide time and place for blood pressure monitoring • Allow time off for medical appointments and monitoring
Insomnia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide scheduling changes such as flexible schedules or telework (which may include a temporary transfer to a position that provides this kind of flexibility) • Provide a cot for lying down and take breaks as needed

Intrauterine growth restriction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide scheduling changes such as flexible schedules or telework (which may include a temporary transfer to a position that provides this kind of flexibility)
Lactation complication, such as breast engorgement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a private space for pumping • Provide breaks every 3-5 hours lasting at least 20 minutes in order to pump
Lower extremity edema	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide employee with stool or chair to sit on while working • Modify workstation to allow elevation of legs • Allow short breaks for movement or exercise – state how frequently (e.g., approximately every two hours, or “as necessary”) • Modify footwear requirements – be specific
Lower extremity varicosities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow short breaks for movement or exercise – be specific as to timing (e.g., approximately every two hours, or “as necessary”) • Modify workstation to provide ability to sit or stand as needed
Lumbar lordosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>See musculoskeletal pain</i>
Mastitis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a private space for pumping • Provide breaks every 3-4 hours lasting at least 20 minutes in order to pump
Migraine headaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change lighting in the work area to create a less bright environment • Limit exposure to noise and fragrances • Provide scheduling changes such as flexible schedules or telework (which may include a temporary transfer to a position that provides this kind of flexibility)
Musculoskeletal pain (back pain)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow use of a heating pad as needed • Allow sitting while working • Allow assistance from coworkers in lifting • Provide assistive equipment to lift more than X pounds • Allow modification of workstation • Temporarily modify particular duties of the job • Must be allowed to wear belt
Oligohydramnios	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time off for medical appointments
Pelvic pain (round ligament pain, uterine pain, Braxton Hicks, degenerating fibroid)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow lifting assistance from coworkers • Provide assistive equipment to lift more than 25 pounds • Modify workstation to provide ability to sit or stand as needed • Provide scheduling changes such as flexible schedules or telework (which may include a temporary transfer to a position that provides this kind of flexibility)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow more frequent breaks - be specific as to timing (e.g., approximately every two hours, or “as necessary”)
Pelvic varicosities (hemorrhoids)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow employee to avoid being in a seated position all day or to use a special cushion
Placental abruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time off for medical appointments • Provide scheduling changes such as flexible schedules or telework (which may include a temporary transfer to a position that provides this kind of flexibility) • Allow assistance from coworkers with lifting • Provide assistive equipment to lift more than X pounds • Temporarily modify particular duties of the job • Move workstation close to restrooms
Preterm pregnancy risk (shortened cervix, incompetent cervix, cerclage, threatened preterm labor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time off for medical appointments
Pulmonary embolism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time off for medical appointments • Modify workstation to allow elevation of legs • Allow short breaks for movement or exercise – be specific as to timing (e.g., approximately every two hours, or “as necessary”) • Must be allowed to take medications, including injections, at work
Rash, dermatitis, PUPPP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow use of protective gloves or clothing as recommended
Sciatica	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow lifting assistance from coworkers • Provide assistive equipment to lift more than X pounds • Modify workstation to provide ability to sit or stand as needed • Provide scheduling changes such as flexible schedules or telework (which may include a temporary transfer to a position that provides this kind of flexibility) • Allow more frequent breaks - be specific as to timing (e.g., approximately every two hours, or “as necessary”)
Stroke (TIA, embolus, CVA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time off for medical appointments • Allow flexible schedule • Must be allowed to take medications, including injections, at work
Sub-chorionic hematoma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time off for medical appointments

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide scheduling changes such as flexible schedules or telework (which may include a temporary transfer to a position that provides this kind of flexibility) • Allow assistance from coworkers with lifting • Provide assistive equipment to lift more than X pounds • Temporarily modify particular duties of the job • Move workstation close to restrooms
Symphyseal separation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modify workstation to provide ability to sit or stand as needed • Provide scheduling changes such as flexible schedules or telework (which may include a temporary transfer to a position that provides this kind of flexibility)
Syncope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a stool or chair to sit on while working • Allow more frequent breaks - be specific as to timing (e.g., approximately every two hours, or “as necessary”) • Allow lifting assistance from coworkers • Provide assistive equipment to lift more than X pounds • Temporarily modify specific duties of the job • Move workstation close to restrooms
Thrombocytopenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time off from work for medical appointments • Modify work duties to temporarily refrain from engaging in activities that would cause bruising (identify specific activities)
Urinary tract Infection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow more frequent bathroom breaks as needed • Allow employee to carry a bottle of water
Vaginal laceration separation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>See wound complications</i>
Wound complications, such as cesarean incision infection or vaginal laceration separation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow sitting while working • Allow assistance from coworkers in lifting • Allow modification of workstation • Allow assistance from coworkers in activities that require bending or twisting • Provide assistive equipment to lift more than X pounds • Allow frequent bathroom privilege • Temporarily modify particular duties of the job