

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

Definition

Natural family planning involves practicing birth control methods that do not involve drugs or contraceptive devices. It makes use of body temperature, cervical mucus changes, excretion of LH (luteinizing hormone), and menstrual calendars.

Benefits of Natural Family Planning

- No health risks; very low-cost
- Helps a woman to become informed about her reproductive cycle
- Helps prevent some unwanted pregnancies if the method is followed properly
- Is accepted by most religions that oppose other contraceptive methods

Disadvantages

- Sexual activity is limited to certain days of the month.
- Difficult to use if the woman has irregular periods
- Does not allow for sexual spontaneity and requires a lot of self-control.
- The woman must keep detailed records of many (8) menstrual cycles before this can be used as a method of birth control.
- Requires a great deal of counseling and education at the first visit and on an ongoing basis.
- Only 70% reliable for preventing pregnancy

Calendar Method

Keeping a Calendar

You will need to use a calendar to keep track of when your period starts and finishes, and how long it lasts.

The idea of the calendar method is for you to keep a record of when you menstruate, or have your period (this is the easy part!) and when you ovulate (or when an egg is released from your ovary). Sperm live up to 5 days; the egg lives only about 24 hours. Therefore, most women are fertile a few days before to a few days after ovulation.

Calculating this time period is the more difficult part. It involves keeping a very accurate record of your menstrual cycle, doing monthly calculations, and understanding how your body works. There are some computer-generated programs available to help with these calculations. Some success has been documented with the use of home urine LH dipstick measurements to determine time of ovulation. Consult your health care provider for more information.

Your Menstrual Cycle

The first day of your period is called **day 1 of your menstrual cycle**. The last day of your cycle is the day before your next period begins. The number of days in your menstrual cycle are simply the number of days from Day 1 of one period to Day 1 of the next. It is called a cycle because every month your body repeats two steps:

1. You have your period (menstruate).
2. A number of days later, an egg is released from your ovary.

This second step is called **ovulation**. It is the time of the month that you are fertile, or at a very high risk for getting pregnant.

Shortest and Longest Cycle

After you have kept a calendar of your menstrual cycle for 8 months, you will need to use the smallest number and the largest number for your calculations. Normal menstrual cycles range from 21 to 35 days.

When Not to Have Sex

Once you know the shortest and longest durations of your cycle, you can figure out when you are at a high risk for getting pregnant. Say your shortest cycle was 25 days and your longest was 30 days long. The two numbers you need to remember are **18** and **11**. By subtracting 18 from your shortest cycle (25) and 11 from your longest (30), you get the numbers 7 and 19.

These calculations mean that from the 7th to the 19th day of your cycle you would:

- ovulate and be fertile
- be at a high risk for getting pregnant
- be very wise not to have sex

COITUS INTERRUPTUS OR WITHDRAWAL—NOT RECOMMENDED

Coitus iriterruptus is a fancy name for having intercourse and “pulling out” before ejaculation. There are some misconceptions about using this form of birth control.

Many, many unwanted pregnancies have resulted from this approach to birth control. Many people believe that if the male partner pulls his penis out of the woman’s vagina before he ejaculates, that this will prevent her from getting pregnant. This is FALSE. In reality, many sperm are released from the penis into the vagina in small droplets before the male partner ejaculates (releases the sperm); that is, by the time he pulls out,

thousands of sperm are already searching for the egg.

CONTACT OUR OFFICE

If you have any questions or concerns.

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