

Natural Family Planning (NFP)

What is it?

NFP relies on awareness of a woman's fertility pattern. It has none of the adverse side effects of artificial methods of contraception, but its effectiveness is highly variable, with failure rates generally ranging from 2-24%. [Failure rates are even higher for women with very irregular menstrual cycles.]

NFP attempts to predict when ovulation will occur, thereby determining "safe" and "unsafe" days for intercourse. NFP requires careful monitoring of the menstrual cycle and periodic abstinence from intercourse for several days a month.

This method *is* recommended for women who cannot take or dislike hormonal contraception, who have religious conflicts with artificial birth control, who desire to plan a pregnancy, or who want a more natural method and are in touch with their bodies' patterns.

This method is *not* recommended for women with irregular menstrual cycles or for women whose busy lives do not permit the necessary monitoring.

The most common of these methods are the basal body temperature method (BBT), and the cervical mucus method. They can be used together for greater effectiveness.

When using the BBT method, a woman takes her temperature of her body at rest every morning before rising with a special oral thermometer called a basal body thermometer. Unlike a regular fever thermometer, this one is precise enough to measure the very small changes in body temperature that occur normally during a woman's cycle.

The cervical mucus method relies on a woman observing the normal changes in the consistency of her vaginal/cervical mucus that occur during her cycle.

What are the advantages?

- no serious health risks
- inexpensive
- helpful in planning or preventing a pregnancy
- acceptable to couples with religious concerns about birth control.

What are the disadvantages?

- requires high degree of motivation and knowledge
- requires partner support and understanding
- accurate record keeping
- requires training from a qualified educator
- may restrict sexual spontaneity

How often does it fail?

Perfect user	2-20%
Typical user	24%

What is the cost?

Classes approximately \$100 per couple; thermometers approximately \$12; no further costs

What else do I need to know?

The take home message with NFP is that you can learn the patterns your body goes through and apply rules that allow you to achieve or avoid a pregnancy. NFP has sound scientific research behind it. ***It is not the same as the rhythm method***, which relies mostly on counting days of the cycle and estimating. But, it is also not as easy as what you've read in this brochure. A typical class is 4 hours long. Two hours are spent learning the patterns and how to keep track of them, then going home and practicing the charting for two weeks. The second class is another two hours of learning the rules and how to apply them.

We also recommend reading a book called Patterns, by Barbara Kass-Annese, one of the best and clearest references available.

A service of the Klotz Student Health Center's Health Promotion Dept.

For more information,
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