

# Fertility Awareness Method (Natural Family Planning)

The underlying idea of the Fertility Awareness Method (FAM) is understanding one's monthly fertility pattern to avoid an unintended pregnancy, or plan a pregnancy. To use this method effectively to avoid pregnancy, you need to learn and understand all parts of the method well. Counting the number of days to the middle of a woman's menstrual cycle, also called the Rhythm Method, is not an accurate way to prevent pregnancy. We recommend consulting with a Natural Family Planning counselor to understand your cycle carefully and to learn to use the method.

## EFFECTIVENESS

If used correctly and consistently every cycle and if the couple practices abstinence during the woman's fertile period, the rate of pregnancy for couples using the fertility awareness method is 1% to 9%. When statistics take into account a woman forgetting or misusing the method, the typical rate of pregnancy is approximately 25%.

The Fertility Awareness Method provides no protection against acquiring sexually transmitted infections (STIs), which are also referred to as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

## HOW IT WORKS

Ovulation occurs approximately 14 days before a woman's next period, and the length of a woman's cycle can change from month to month depending on things like stress or illness. Counting forward from a woman's last period is not much help.

When talking about fertility, we have to consider both the life of the egg and the life of the sperm. An egg lives in a woman's body for about 1 day while sperm can live in a woman's body 3 to 5 days. Conception is most likely to occur when intercourse occurs in the 4 to 5 days before ovulation or on the day of ovulation. This time period is referred to as a woman's fertile period.

In order to become aware of her fertile period, a woman can observe the cyclic variations in her cervical mucus and basal body temperature as well as other cyclic body changes, which involves taking her temperature every morning before getting out of bed (even getting up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom may throw off the morning temperature reading), observing the amount and consistency of vaginal mucus every day, and charting the temperature and mucus results so that she can see the changes that occur throughout the menstrual cycle.

## ADVANTAGES

- It is an opportunity for a woman to understand her cycle.
- There are no medical side effects.
- It can determine fertile periods if pregnancy is desired.
- It may be an acceptable contraceptive method if a person's religious beliefs do not approve of other methods.

## DISADVANTAGES

- A typical college student's schedule decreases the effectiveness of this method. Irregular sleep patterns, stress and illness can make it difficult to use this method accurately and consistently.
- Women who have irregular cycles will find this method difficult to use.
- It takes a few cycles before a woman can learn to use it confidently.
- It requires constant motivation and commitment combined with a good understanding of the method.
- A couple has to use another method of contraception during the woman's fertile period or abstain from intercourse.
- This method provides no protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

## SCHEDULING AN APPOINTMENT

Call 275-2662 to schedule an appointment at the University Health Service (UHS). UHS offers a full range of gynecological and contraceptive services. You can schedule an appointment with your primary care provider (PCP) or with one of the women's health nurse practitioners for gynecological care and to discuss contraceptive options. All visits to UHS are confidential.

## LINKS

*For more information about the FAM and to learn ways to chart your fertility, you can visit:*

Planned Parenthood  
<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/bc/WaysToChart.html>