

Sexual Health

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING



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Natural Family Planning includes types of birth control methods that do not require hormonal or barrier methods. Typical effectiveness rate is 70 – 80%. The rate can be higher if performed correctly and consistently every time, and if the woman has regular monthly periods.

How does it work?

By understanding and monitoring a woman's menstrual cycle, she can detect changes in her body throughout her cycle and avoid intercourse during ovulation.

Advantages

- No added hormones.
- Allows the woman to know her body and follow her menstrual cycle.
- Can help with future pregnancy planning.
- Cost effective.

Points to Consider

- Requires strong motivation, willingness and a period of abstinence of at least one week a month.
- High failure rate, especially for women with irregular menstrual cycles.
- It is strongly advised that instructions be obtained from a trained natural family planning instructor before using these methods.

Calendar Method

- A woman would determine the start of her fertility period by subtracting 20 days from her shortest menstrual cycle.
- To determine the end of her fertility period, she subtracts 10 days from her longest menstrual period.
- The fertility period is when a woman is most likely to become pregnant, so unprotected sexual intercourse must be avoided during this 8 to 10 day period each month.

Temperature (Symptothermal) Method

- For this method, a woman would monitor her basal body temperature and look for changes in the cervical mucus. This can help identify when ovulation occurs.
- This is thought to be the most effective of all the natural family planning methods.

Breastfeeding (Lactational Amenorrhea - LAM) Method

- LAM is a temporary family planning method allowing women to rely on breastfeeding for birth control. Based on scientific research the method uses three measures of women's fertility:
 - The return of her menstrual period
 - Her patterns of breastfeeding
 - The age of the baby

A woman can use LAM if:

- her menstrual period has not returned since the birth of her child.
- She is breastfeeding on demand, both day and night, and not feeding her baby other foods or liquids regularly.
- Her baby is less than six months old.
- When one of the above conditions changes, this method is no longer effective.

Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Protection

Natural Family Planning does not protect against STIs.

Adapted with permission from the Middlesex London Health Unit.