

Love's Perfect Design

A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING
FERTILITY AWARENESS





Made for Relationship

God created us to be in relationship with Him and one another. The complementary relationship of husband + wife is an expression of love. The marital act (sex) is a form of communication that is meant to build intimacy and be open to new life. When a couple is ready to have children or delay pregnancy for just reasons, fertility awareness and the modern methods of **Natural Family Planning (NFP)** can help. NFP uses a woman's naturally occurring, biological signs to indicate when she is fertile and infertile. These methods respect a woman's body, the marital act, and God's plan for marriage.

NFP Methods

Green: These methods are a healthy way to plan a family because no hormones, barriers (chemical or physical), or surgical devices are used. Men and women are the crown of God's creation, so it's no surprise that women are designed to have naturally occurring cycles that utilize specific, natural biomarkers of fertile and infertile phases to support organic and responsible family planning.

Reproductive Science: Over the past fifty years, dedicated doctors and scientists perfected natural and biologically sound methods that range in **effectiveness from 97-99.6%; a correct use efficacy rate that easily competes with artificial contraceptives.**¹ NFP is not our grandparents' "Rhythm Method."

"Science is called to ally itself with wisdom."

Pope St. John Paul II

Holistic: Fertility awareness through the lens of NFP looks at the WHOLE person. When a woman pays close attention to her menstrual/fertility cycle, she learns about the subtlest changes within her body, mind, and soul. Nothing is concealed through artificial means. With this knowledge, she can work with her healthcare provider to determine if there is a problem and decide on the best course of treatment.

Foster Intimacy:

Intimacy is vital for a long and happy marriage. Pope Francis wrote in *The Joy of Love*, “**The love between husband and wife . . . is an ‘affective union,’ spiritual and sacrificial, which combines the warmth of friendship and erotic passion, and endures long after emotions and passion subside.**”²

Intimacy is more than having sex, and having sex does not mean you are being truly intimate. Being intimate means being vulnerable, letting go of your fears, communicating, and trusting that your spouse accepts all of you. NFP invites a husband to become an active, caring, and knowledgeable participant in a couple's intimate reality, their fertility.



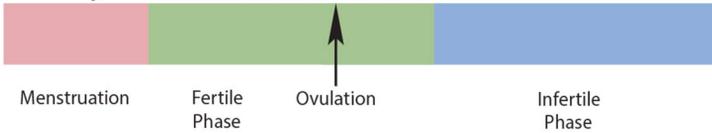
“*Considering that we used contraception before, the greatest gift of practicing fertility awareness has been that we have learned how to love each other better. When you communicate regularly on something so intimate it naturally spills over into every other part of your marriage. We learned to love each other in a way that we didn't realize was possible. It's been a gift.*”

Fred + Kelly

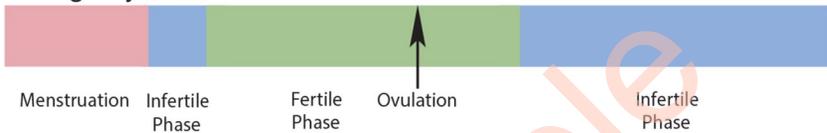
The Fertility Cycle

Each woman is uniquely + wonderfully made, so not all cycles are the same. It is common for menstrual/fertility cycles to range from 23-35 days.³ Because cycles vary, the fertile phase can move. The examples below show how cycles differ among women or how one woman's cycle can change over time. It is important to learn about your unique cycle before you attempt to achieve or postpone pregnancy.

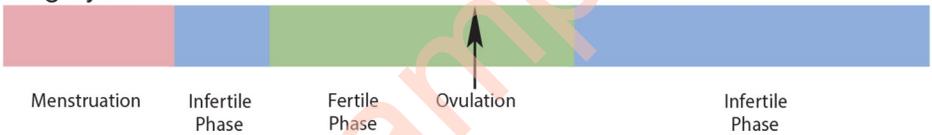
Short Cycle



Average Cycle



Long Cycle



Identifying the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's cycle can help a couple plan their family. If a couple wants to delay pregnancy, they should not have intercourse during the fertile phase. If they are trying to conceive, this is the opportune time. A woman who is breastfeeding postpartum may not be "cycling" and should consult a NFP instructor before relying on breastfeeding as a way of avoiding pregnancy.

“ I started doing the Billings Method to gain a greater understanding of how my body works, then I got engaged! As Catholics, we believe in NFP, so there was no question as to how we would plan our family. It's important to have us both on the same page, doing this together. I love that this approach will foster an atmosphere where we never stop 'dating' each other. ”

Jamille

A Woman's Body

"You are fearfully + wonderfully made"

Psalm 139: 14

Women's bodies are created with naturally occurring signs known as biomarkers. Women, and, better yet, a couple, can learn to observe, record, and interpret physical symptoms such as **basal body temperature (BBT)**, **cervical mucus**, and **fertility hormones** in order to identify fertile or infertile phases.

BBT is your body's core temperature upon waking from a prolonged sleep. Due to hormonal activity, a woman's resting temperature changes throughout her menstrual cycle. A rise in BBT confirms ovulation. A sustained temperature hike can indicate the end of the fertile phase.

Cervical mucus is fluid secreted by the cervix that nourishes and protects the sperm as it travels to a woman's egg. Charting the presence and changes in the consistency of the cervical mucus will determine the beginning and end of your fertile phase.

Fertility Hormones of the menstrual cycle include LH, estrogen, and progesterone. They are found in the byproducts of urine and are easily detected with personal fertility tracking tools to identify the start, peak, and end of fertility.

Be Proactive and learn how your body functions even if you are not married. Understanding how to track these biomarkers will help you create a "baseline" for your unique cycle. Should an issue present itself as you are charting, you can inform your healthcare provider and be treated.





The NFP Advantage

Effective + NO Side Effects: According to the *Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine*, efficacy for NFP ranges from 97-99.6% depending on the method; a correct use rate that easily competes with artificial contraceptives, yet there are NO side effects.⁴

Hormonal contraceptives suppress a woman's fertility and can have negative side effects, such as decreased libido, increased risk of depression, breakthrough bleeding, missed periods, nausea, headache and migraines, visual problems, increased vaginal discharge, weight gain, etc.⁵ There are "risks" which include blood clots, deep vein thrombosis (DVT), stroke, heart attack, increased blood pressure, and higher incidence of certain cancers.⁶ In addition, people are often unaware that contraceptives, like the IUD, can prevent implantation of a fertilized egg causing a newly formed life to be expelled during menstruation.⁷

A Noble Pursuit: "The husband and wife, through the mutual gift of themselves . . . develop a union of two persons in which they perfect one another, cooperating with God in the generation and rearing of new lives."⁸ Couples are called to fulfill the dual meanings of sex: bonding + babies, love + life. This doesn't mean couples should have as many children as possible, but rather invites them to cooperate with God's design for sex while discerning His will for their family. The marital act is the bodily expression of your marriage vows. It should be free, faithful, total, and respectful of its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life.

"Married love particularly reveals its true nature and nobility when we realize that it takes its origin from God, who 'is love.'"

Pope St. Paul VI

Strengthens Marriages: NFP can be challenging, but when couples see this lifestyle choice as a mutual exercise, they can improve communication, explore new forms of romance and intimacy, and build virtue while trying to postpone pregnancy for just reasons.

“ *Using Natural Family Planning (NFP) in our marriage has given us the freedom to be open to God’s plan for our marriage and family. The sacrifice essential to practicing NFP has formed us into better communicators, deepened our intimacy, and helped us to grow in virtue. We know the love and joy we experience in our family is directly related to our choice to use NFP.* ”

Meghan + Collin

Respects the Marital Embrace — Love + Life: The Divine purpose for the marital embrace is unitive and procreative. NFP methods and contraceptives may both aim to postpone children for just reasons, but the “means” by which each achieves that goal are very different. NFP respects natural and Divine law by delaying intercourse during a fertile phase, while contraceptives take deliberate action before, during, or after intercourse to render sex sterile or incomplete.

If You Struggle with Infertility or a Reproductive Condition

Don’t lose hope! This is often an indication of an underlying health issue such as endometriosis, polycystic ovaries, progesterone/estrogen imbalance, etc. Fertility awareness methods can help women learn and discern their bodily “cues” so problems can be diagnosed and treated quickly.

NaProTECHNOLOGY, also known as Natural Procreative Technology, is a new health science that taps into the power of a woman’s cycle to treat gynecological and reproductive conditions. A woman and her NaPro-trained doctor use the Creighton Model FertilityCare™ System biomarkers to monitor the occurrence of various hormonal events during the menstrual cycle. By cooperating with a woman’s cycle, NaProTECHNOLOGY can identify problems and potentially correct the underlying cause, while sustaining procreative potential.⁹

For a NaPro doctor visit fertilitycare.org/find-a-mc.





Knowledge = Empowerment

My OB/GYN is not familiar with NFP: It's not surprising considering "only 3-6% of physicians had correct knowledge of the effectiveness in perfect use of the NFP methods cited."¹⁰

So where does this leave a couple who is curious to know more?

- 1.** Check out some of the websites listed in this booklet, then select a method that might work for you as a couple.
- 2.** **Connect with a certified instructor trained in your method of choice, either in person or online, who will offer instruction and continued support to help you achieve the greatest efficacy.**
- 3.** Once you have learned a method from a trained instructor, take advantage of apps and fertility tools that make charting your fertility easier.

With a little perseverance, cooperation, and training, you will be on your way to an effective, green, scientific, and holistic way to manage your fertility as a couple which respects your body, your marriage, and God's plan for life + love.

The following page contains a list of organizations that offer online and/or in person instruction for the various methods. Each use one or more biomarkers to identify the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's fertility cycle. All of the listed methods offer instruction in both English and Spanish.

NFP Methods

Organization	BIOMARKERS USED			Method Type**
	Cervical Fluid	Basal Body Temp. (BBT)	Fertility Hormones*	
Billings Ovulation Method Association boma-usa.org	✓			OM
Boston Cross Check bostoncrosscheck.com	✓	✓	✓ option	STM with SHM option
Couple to Couple League ccli.org	✓	✓		STM
Creighton Fertility Care System (CrMs) fertilitycare.org	✓			OM
Family of the Americas familyplanning.net	✓			OM
Marquette Model marquettetmethod.com	✓ option	✓ option	✓	SHM with STM option
SymptoPro symptopro.org	✓	✓		STM

*Fertility hormones can be tested in a variety of ways such as a personal, home use fertility monitor, and/or urine test strips.

**OM = Ovulation Method | STM = Sympto-Thermal | SHM = Sympto-Hormonal.

Note: This is not a complete list of available methods.

Lactational Amenorrhea Method: Please note that if you are thinking of using postpartum breastfeeding as a method to postpone pregnancy, you should first consult your NFP instructor to learn more about this approach. If you do not have an instructor, contact your diocesan office or one of the organizations listed above to learn more.



Other Resources

factsaboutfertility.org – The Fertility Appreciation Collaborative is comprised of physicians, health care professionals, and educators working together to teach the science (FACTS) of natural or fertility awareness based methods.

femmhealth.org – A comprehensive women's health program that teaches women to understand their bodies and how to recognize hormonal and other vital signs of health. FEMM offers a free health app to track your health and reproductive goals and the latest developments in science-based research.

mycatholicdoctor.com – Accessible health care by a variety of Catholic health providers.

ncbcenter.org – The National Catholic Bioethics Center provides research, education, and consultations that promote Church teaching in health care.

naturalwomanhood.org – Helps young women and couples find the best way to learn about their bodies, charting, and avoiding or achieving pregnancy.

organic-conceptions.com – Helps couples struggling with infertility optimize all aspects of their health and well-being to assist with conception.

popepaulvi.com – The Pope Paul VI Institute for Reproductive Health specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of reproductive and gynecologic conditions.

uscgb.org (search "NFP") – Resources from the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops.

Contraception and Catholicism, What the Church Teaches and Why
by Dr. Angela Franks.



Sample

 EVANGELIZE