

# Facts About **Natural Family Planning or Rhythm Method (Fertility Awareness-Based Method)**

## **What is the natural family planning or rhythm method (fertility awareness-based method)?**

Fertility Awareness-based Methods (FAMs) (sometimes known as natural family planning or the rhythm method) are a way of finding out the days you are most likely to get pregnant and then not having sex on those days.

It means paying close attention to your menstrual cycle to track when your body releases an egg. There are several ways to track your cycle:

- Basal Body Temperature Method – Every morning before you get out of bed, you take your temperature with a special (basal) thermometer (by mouth). This is a different kind of thermometer than the kind you use when you have a fever. When your temperature rises a little on the basal thermometer, it is a sign that your ovary has released an egg.



- Calendar Method – Use this method to figure out about when your ovary releases an egg. Most women release an egg (ovulate) about 2 weeks before their next period. You can chart on a calendar, by using cycle beads, or by using an app that you can download to your phone or other electronic device.
- Cervical Mucus (Discharge) Method – Each day you check the mucus discharge from your vagina (birth canal). Most of the time it is thick and sticky (as an egg ripens) When the mucus turns clear and is thin and slippery, then the egg is likely to be released. This is when you are most likely to get pregnant.
- Two-Day Method – Check for cervical discharge every day. If you have any cervical discharge today or yesterday, you should not have unprotected sex.
- Standard Days Method – Track your cycle for several months to be sure your cycle is always between 26 and 32 days long. Then, do not have unprotected vaginal sex on days 8 – 19.

**Fertility awareness is most effective when more than one method above is used.**

## **How does the natural family planning or rhythm method (fertility awareness-based method) work?**

These methods work by keeping sperm out of the vagina when a woman is most fertile and most likely to become pregnant.

To keep from becoming pregnant, **DO NOT** have vaginal sex on the days you are most likely to become pregnant. Or you can use a **condom** or a **diaphragm** on those days. You can enjoy **other kinds** of sexual activity instead of vaginal sex on the days you are most likely to become pregnant.

**Withdrawal is NOT an effective method of birth control.**

## **How well do these methods work?**

If you are very careful about taking your temperature and watching for certain body changes, these methods work about 76% of the time – if they are always used correctly. Remember, these methods may not be as reliable as other methods.

## **Who should NOT use this method?**

You should not depend on Fertility Awareness-Based methods if you:

- Have irregular periods
- Have more than one sex partner
- Have a partner who does not work with you
- Have a sexually transmitted infection or frequent abnormal vaginal discharges
- Don't want to take time and effort each day to track days of your menstrual cycle, chart your temperature and check the changes in your cervical mucus

## **REMEMBER:**

The natural family planning or rhythm method does not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or human immunodeficiency disease (HIV). To protect yourself, use a latex or vinyl condom every time you have oral, vaginal or anal sex.

