Birth Control: Natural Family Planning

Birth control can be used when you do not want to get pregnant. Natural family planning is birth control without the use of chemicals (vaginal spermicide or oral contraceptives) or barriers (condoms or diaphragms).

What is natural family planning?

Natural family planning is a way of finding out which days each month you are most likely to get pregnant. You should **not** have sex during that time. There are three different ways to determine when you are most likely to get pregnant. You can:

- Check body temperature.
- Check vaginal discharge.
- Keep a calendar of your menstrual period.

All of these ways can help predict when you are most likely to release an egg (ovulate) and get pregnant.

How good is natural family planning?

Natural family planning, when used correctly, is about 75% effective. However, it requires couples to not have sex for a large number of days each month. There are no religious objections to natural family planning as a method of birth control. Natural family planning helps you learn about your menstrual cycle.

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Learn more about your health care.

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How do I use the different ways for natural family planning?

Careful records must be kept for at least 4 months before relying on one of these methods. Failures are common if the rules are not followed exactly. A study of these records will tell you when you should not have sex.

- **Check Body Temperature:**

  Take your temperature every morning before getting out of bed. You may use a regular digital thermometer. When there is small drop in your temperature, release of the egg from the ovary (ovulation) has started. This begins the time when you are most likely to get pregnant. This drop in temperature will be followed by a slight rise in temperature over a day or two. **You must not have sex from the 4th day of your cycle (day 1 is the first day of your last period) until your temperature has increased for 3 days in a row.**

- **Check Vaginal Discharge:**

  During your reproductive cycle, there are changes in the consistency of the vaginal drainage (mucous). Normally the drainage is cloudy. The presence of an increased amount of clear, slippery drainage means ovulation has occurred. **Do not have sex from day 4 of the cycle until 4 days after the final day of clear, slippery vaginal drainage.**

- **Keeping a Calendar of Your Menstrual Periods:**

  Record the length of your menstrual periods for 12 months. Put a mark on your calendar the day that your menstrual period starts every month. At the end of the year, count the number of days from one mark to the next mark. This gives you the length of your menstrual (reproductive) cycle each month. The average menstrual cycle is 28 days. Once you have recorded these numbers, subtract 19 from the shortest cycle and 10 from the longest cycle. Do not have sex during those days of your cycle.

  For example:

  - If your shortest cycle was 23 days, subtract 19 from 23 which is 4.
  - If your longest cycle was 34 days, subtract 10 from 34 which is 24.

- In this example, the time you are most likely to get pregnant is between the 4th and 24th days of every cycle. You should not have sex during those days. You should also not have sex for 2 to 3 days before and after those days to be safe.

Remember, you must keep track of your menstrual periods for one year before you can calculate your unsafe time, using the calendar method.

Are there problems with natural family planning?

It is difficult to use natural family planning if your menstrual periods are irregular. You should not have sex during a large part of your menstrual cycle. Stress and illness can change the length of a woman's menstrual cycle and this can make natural family planning unreliable. This method requires a lot of work and discipline for both partners in a relationship. A combination of the three methods increases the success.

- **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.**