

Natural Family Planning

Keith Merritt, MD

Background

- Cheap and safe (other than unintended pregnancies)
- Requires education for proper use and better efficacy
- Perfect use failure rates 0.4 – 5% ; typical use failure rates 22 – 24%
- Does not protect against STD transmission
- All methods depend on
 - Fact that each woman's cycle has fertile and infertile days
 - Both sperm and eggs have very limited lifespans
 - There is only one ovulation per cycle
 - A woman's ability to monitor her cycle and its signs & symptoms
- A woman may determine her fertile days by knowing her cycle length and by following her vaginal secretions &/or body temperature to determine the fertile days surrounding her monthly ovulation
- Chance of becoming pregnant
 - 0%: 5 days before ovulation, 11%: 4 days before ovulation
 - 26%: 1 day before ovulation, 15%: on day of ovulation
 - 9%: 1 day after ovulation, 0%: 3 days after ovulation
- That is, a woman is fertile from 4-5 days before ovulation to 1 day after ovulation giving a 5-6 day fertile period for each cycle
 - The challenge for a woman is determining when she ovulates

Establishing Day of Ovulation

- Three methods
 - By cycle length
 - By change in cervical (vaginal) secretions
 - By measuring early morning temperature (BBT thermometer)
- By cycle length
 - Ovulation occurs during the four days before or after a cycles mid-point in 95% of women (day #1 of a cycle is the 1st day of bleeding)

- By cervical secretions
 - Secretions become abundant, clear, wet and stretchy and clear just before, during and just after ovulation
 - Secretions follow the same sequence every month
 - Menses, then
 - No secretions for 3 – 4 days, then
 - Scant, thick, cloudy secretions for 3 – 5 days, then
 - Abundant, clear, wet stretchy and clear for 3-4 days, then
 - No secretions for 11 – 14 days, then
 - Menses
 - The clear, wet, stretchy, clear secretions surrounding ovulation are caused by a spike in estrogen secretion during ovulation- the purpose is to aid sperm health and transportation to the egg
- By early morning temperature (Basal body temperature)
 - Measured just before getting out of bed each morning
 - Requires a special thermometer(BBT thermometer)- at drug store
 - Looking for 0.5 degree F rise in morning temperature
 - This rise occurs 1 – 2 days after ovulation
 - Signals end of fertile period

Women who should not Use Natural Family Planning

- Adolescents who recently started having menstrual flows
- Women who are recently postpartum
- Women who recently stopped using hormonal birth control

- Women who are breastfeeding
- Women who are perimenopausal (approaching menopause)

CALENDER METHODS

Standard Days Method

- Easiest of all methods & requires least number of days of abstinence
- Avoid intercourse on days 8 – 19 of cycle (Day#1= 1st day of menses)
- Must have menstrual cycles between 26 & 32 days long
- Perfect use failure below 5%; typical use failure 12%
- A visual tool to track fertile days is helpful
 - cyclebeads & icyclebeads: www.cyclebeads.com

Cervical Mucous (Ovulation) Method

- Requires woman to evaluate her secretions several times each day
 - Too determine if that day is a fertile day
 - Avoid unprotected intercourse on those days plus additional days- 14 to 17 days of abstinence each cycle
 - Takes more time to teach and to learn
 - Several variants of method
 - Billings & Creighton methods
 - Two Day method
- Billings & Creighton Methods
 - Billings is oldest
 - Creighton requires scoring by multi-characteristics of secretions
 - Counseled to avoid intercourse
 - During menses

- On days following intercourse (semen vs secretions?)
- On days with abundant, wet, slippery, clear secretions
- On four days after end of abundant, wet, slippery secretions
- Perfect use failure 3%; typical use failure 23%
 - Reflects difficulty in learning methods & in complying with days of abstinence

- TwoDay Method
 - Easier to use than Billings & Creighton Methods
 - Bases fertile period only by presence of secretions
 - Avoid intercourse on any day with secretions and for one day following a day of secretions
 - 10-14 days each cycle
 - Perfect use failure rate 3.5%; typical use failure below 14%
 - Reflects greater simplicity- woman avoids intercourse if secretions noted on that day or on day before that day

Symptothermal Method

- Based on
 - Presence of abundant, slippery, wet, stretchy, clear secretions marking beginning of fertile period
 - Rise in basal body temperature marking end of fertile period
 - Use BBT thermometer just before getting out of bed
- Women are counseled to avoid intercourse
 - On days with any secretions
 - On days following intercourse (semen vs secretions?)
 - Until 4 days of higher temperature follows at least 6 days of lower temperature or until the fourth day following the last day of wet, clear, slippery secretions
- Requires 12 – 17 days of abstinence each cycle
- May be used for any cycle length

- More difficult than other methods and offers no advantage
- Perfect use failure rate 2%; typical use failure rate 13 – 20%

Online Resources

- <http://www.contracept.org/>
- www.irh.org – Standard & TwoDays methods
- www.thebillingsovulationmethod.org – Billings method
- www.crieghtonmodel.com – Crieghton method
- www.fertilityuk.org – Symptothermal method