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Brochure provides an overview of the basis of Natural Family Planning Methods, defining the critical research underlying NFP. The brochure also explains how two promising new NFP methods: the Standard Days Method and the TwoDay Method are easy to teach, learn and use.

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Natural Family Planning

Expanding Options

**INSTITUTE FOR
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH**

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

No single family planning method can meet the needs of all couples. Thus, programs need to offer users a wide range of family planning options. A significant number of women use natural family planning at some point in their lives—to delay a first birth, to plan a pregnancy, when they have stopped using another method, or when they do not have access to contraceptives. Natural family planning has an important role to play in increasing the family planning options available to women and men around the world.

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is not a method in itself—but rather refers to a variety of methods used to plan or prevent pregnancy based on identifying the woman’s fertile days. For all natural methods, avoiding unprotected intercourse during the fertile days is what prevents pregnancy. The range of NFP methods available to couples today makes them appropriate for a wide variety of women. NFP provides an acceptable alternative to diverse population groups with varied religious and

ethical beliefs and to women who wish to use natural methods for medical or personal reasons.

Scientific Basis of NFP

Research has shown that a woman is able to get pregnant during only a few days of her menstrual cycle, for up to five days prior to ovulation, at the time she ovulates, and for about one day afterward. If a woman



*Wilcox, A.J. et. al. (1998)

Pregnancy is most likely to occur right around the time of ovulation. The likelihood of pregnancy rises steadily during the five days before ovulation (from zero to about 35 percent) and starts declining rapidly during the hours immediately before ovulation.

has unprotected intercourse during the days prior to ovulation, the sperm that remain in the woman's reproductive tract can fertilize the egg—the egg can also be fertilized for several hours after ovulation.

There are two different categories of natural methods: (1) calendar-based methods and (2) observation-based methods. Calendar-based methods use calculations to determine the fertile period. Some women prefer to use a numerical calculation to identify when they are fertile, and others use a standard rule or calendar method to identify the fertile window. Observation-based methods rely on the woman's observations of naturally occurring signs of the fertile phase of the menstrual cycle. These signs which are produced by changes in the woman's hormone levels during ovulation, include changes in her cervical secretions, in her cervix, and in her basal body temperature. NFP methods can help a couple use this information to identify fertility to avoid or achieve pregnancy.

The Range of NFP Options

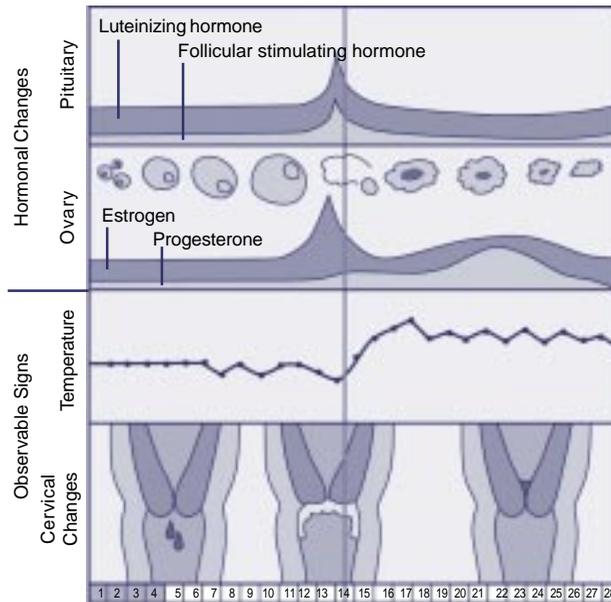
Calendar Rhythm Method. The Calendar Rhythm method was the first NFP method to be developed and is still widely used. Women using the rhythm method keep track of the lengths of previous menstrual cycles to calculate the days on which they can become pregnant. The calculation is based on statistical approximations of the fertile period. The accuracy of calculating the fertile period is affected if the woman's menstrual cycles are irregular or if the calculations are made incorrectly. New calendar-based methods eliminate the need for calculations.

Basal Body Temperature. Women using the basal body temperature (BBT) method to identify the fertile period make daily observations of their temperature during rest. The body temperature is lower prior to ovulation and rises slightly after ovulation (about 0.2 degrees Celsius and 0.4 degrees Fahrenheit). A special BBT

thermometer is commonly used to take the woman's temperature each morning before beginning any activity. Couples who wish to avoid pregnancy abstain from intercourse from the onset of menses until three days after the woman's BBT has risen—signifying the end of the fertile period.

Ovulation Method. The Ovulation method (sometimes also called the Billings or Cervical Mucus method) is based on the fact that the texture and quantity of the secretions produced at the neck of the uterus (cervix) change throughout the menstrual cycle. During the fertile phase, the secretions from the cervix tend to become more fluid so that it flows from the vagina and is felt on the vulva, where it may also be seen. At the time of greatest fertility, these secretions are clear, wet, and stretchy. Couples who wish to avoid pregnancy abstain from intercourse from the time the cervical mucus symptom is detectable until three days after the lubrication phase. A new

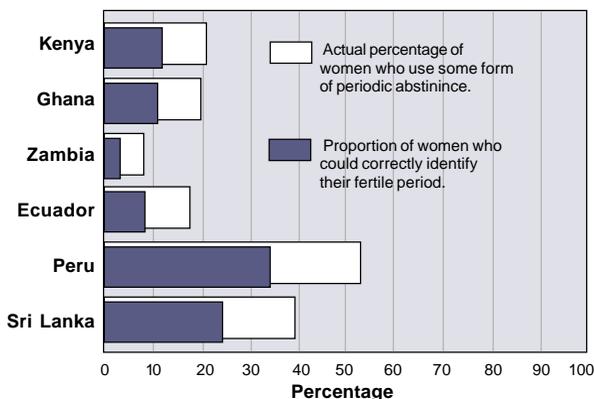
Effect of Hormones on the Cervix and Basal Body Temperature



Hormonal fluctuations produce observable changes in a woman's fertility signs that help her determine when she is fertile.

observation-based method simplifies the woman's observation of cervical secretions for identifying the fertile time.

Sympto-Thermal Method. The sympto-thermal method involves observation of changes in the cervical secretions, along with changes in other fertility signs. The



A high percentage of women around the world report using some form of periodic abstinence, yet many of these same women do not know when during their menstrual cycle they are fertile.



The World Health Organization defines NFP as methods for planning and preventing pregnancy by observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of the menstrual cycle, with the avoidance of intercourse during the fertile phase if pregnancy is not desired

basal body temperature is one of these signs. Other fertility signs are breast tenderness, changes in the position, texture, and opening of the cervix, and mid-cycle pain or bleeding that may accompany ovulation. Couples who wish to avoid pregnancy abstain from intercourse during the fertile period identified by all of these indicators.

Efficacy

Demographic health surveys indicate that in many countries around the world, periodic abstinence and NFP play a major role in women and couples' efforts to avoid pregnancy. Studies by the World Health Organization (WHO) and others have found that when properly used, NFP methods result in a pregnancy rate of only three percent.

According to available data, approximately 15 percent of women worldwide report using some type of "periodic abstinence" in an effort to avoid pregnancy. Yet, the research also suggests that relatively few have a correct understanding of their

reproductive cycles and an accurate knowledge of when they are most likely to become pregnant. Many of these women could benefit from information on using natural methods correctly.

Advancements in Simplifying NFP

During the 1990s, there has been a significant amount of research dedicated to looking for ways to simplify modern NFP methods—in order to make natural methods easier to teach, learn, and use. Some healthcare providers and clients report that NFP methods are complicated and time-consuming to teach and difficult for some clients to learn. These new, simplified methods will make it easier for service delivery programs to incorporate NFP and easier for clients to use them.

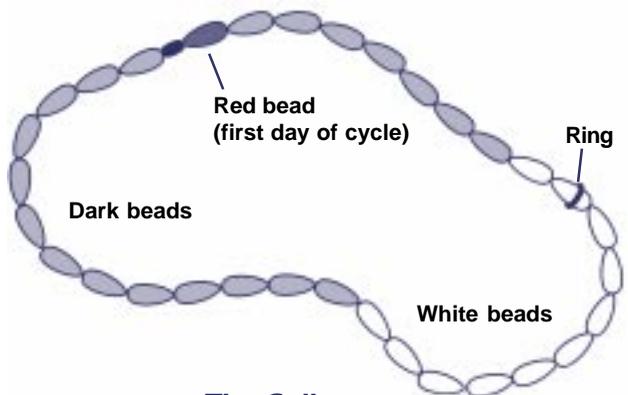
Two promising new NFP methods have been developed. The first called the Standard Days Method, relies on a “standard rule”—or a fixed “window” of fertility—that makes it easy for women to know when they are likely to become pregnant, and

therefore should not have unprotected intercourse if they want to avoid pregnancy. To develop this method, a large data set of women’s reproductive cycles from a WHO study¹ was analyzed. The analysis revealed that the fertile period for most women—those with menstrual cycles between 26 and 32 days in length—is between days 8 to 19 of their menstrual cycles. The method is simple for service providers to teach and for women to use because there are no calculations or observations involved. Results of field trials suggest that the Standard Days Method can be an effective, easy-to-use method of family planning.

To assist in teaching the method, a mnemonic device is being used. The device is a string of beads (“Collar” in Spanish or Portuguese, “Collier” in French) that has 32 plastic beads of different colors, each bead representing a day of the menstrual cycle. A rubber ring is moved one bead every day. When the ring is on a white bead,

**EASIER TO TEACH,
USE, AND LEARN**

¹Arévalo, M et al.
A Fixed Formula to Define the Fertile Window of the Menstrual Cycle as the Basis of a Simple Method of Natural Family Planning



The Collar

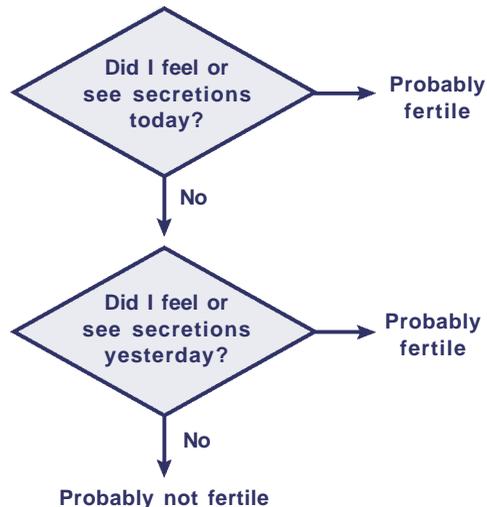
The first day of the cycle is represented by a red bead. Each day the woman moves a small tight-fitting rubber ring along the necklace. On the first day of her menstrual bleeding, she places the rubber ring on the red bead. She moves the ring one bead each day. The brown beads represent her infertile days, and the white beads represent her fertile days.

the woman knows she is fertile and should avoid unprotected intercourse if she does not want to become pregnant. The device is designed to make it very easy for women to know exactly which day of the cycle they are on—without having to write or record any information.

Another method—called the TwoDay Method—is an observation-based method. The TwoDay Method relies on a simple algorithm to help women identify when they are fertile based upon the presence or absence of cervical secretions. If

The TwoDay Algorithm

The woman asks herself two simple questions: (1) Did I see or feel secretions today? and (2) Did I feel or see secretions yesterday? If she notices any secretions (today or yesterday), she is probably fertile and needs to abstain from unprotected intercourse if she wishes to avoid pregnancy.



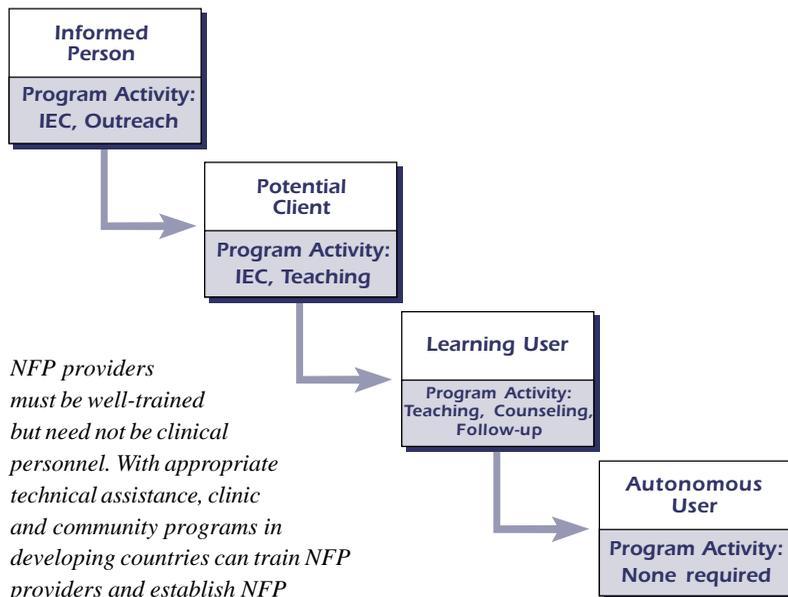
the woman notices any secretions on the current and previous day, then she is probably fertile and needs to abstain from intercourse to avoid a pregnancy. If she notices no secretions on either day, then she is not fertile.

These new, simplified methods, which are still under investigation, will offer important new opportunities both to expand and to simplify the range of modern NFP methods available to couples.

Providing NFP Services

NFP is an education-based approach to family planning. The successful practice of NFP requires couples to monitor their fertility and communicate effectively with each other about their fertility. Simple NFP tools and proven techniques to assist couples are used by program planners, managers, and family planning providers around the world. NFP educational curricula, management information systems, and teaching aids expand the capacity of family

Client Learning Model



NFP providers must be well-trained but need not be clinical personnel. With appropriate technical assistance, clinic and community programs in developing countries can train NFP providers and establish NFP services.

planning programs to provide NFP as an option for their clients.

The Client Learning Model depicts the various phases of awareness, knowledge, acceptance, and autonomous use for a new NFP acceptor—and the interventions required by a program at each phase in order to adequately offer the service. NFP programs throughout the world follow this basic service protocol.

PRACTICAL AND VALUABLE INFORMATION

Fertility Awareness: A Valuable Tool

Fertility awareness is the knowledge that underlies NFP, but it also has a much broader application. It involves understanding basic information about how the reproductive system works, being able to apply it, and being able to discuss it with a partner or healthcare provider. It is key to



A person who understands his or her fertility knows the reproductive processes of the man and the woman and can apply it to their own fertility. For a woman, this includes recognizing the signs, symptoms, and patterns of fertility during her menstrual cycle. For a man, it implies understanding his own reproductive potential.

being able to understand and make informed decisions about reproductive health—for all men and women—regardless of the family planning method they choose.

Fertility awareness education provides practical, valuable information for a wide range of audiences. For adolescents, fertility awareness is a point of reference for discussing changes in their bodies, their growth and development, and the signs of fertility during puberty. For men and women using any method of family planning, it helps them understand how the method works, understand the reasons for possible side effects and recognize when these changes are normal. For couples planning a pregnancy and for those having problems conceiving, fertility awareness has an important role to play. It also helps breastfeeding women to understand breastfeeding's impact on fertility and to identify the signs and symptoms that signal returning fertility.

Strengthening Existing Services by Integrating NFP

With the growing recognition that increasing the range of available family planning options strengthens existing services for clients, many reproductive health and community development programs are working to incorporate NFP into their services. NFP methods provide a number of significant advantages for couples. By incorporating

NFP and fertility awareness education, programs can:

- Increase options for their clients;
- Meet the needs of a broader clientele; and
- Increase their clients' knowledge of their fertility as well as self-observation and communication skills.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Significant Advantages

Women and couples using NFP frequently cite advantages including:

- increased self-awareness and knowledge of their fertility;
- increased reliance on their own resources rather than a family planning program or other sources of contraception;
- increased independence from costly or distant medical services;
- freedom from artificial substances and the side effects or potential medical risks of other methods;
- reduced re-supply costs associated with commodity-based methods;
- the ability to use NFP independently;
- enhanced communication and intimacy;
- for some, the ability to adhere to religious and cultural norms.



Reproductive health programs around the world recognize the importance and positive aspects of the man's role in the use of NFP.

THE INSTITUTE FOR REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Institute for Reproductive Health

The Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University is dedicated to the investigation and advancement of NFP. As part of Georgetown University's



The Institute is leading the design and development of new, simplified NFP methods, including the Standard Days method and the Two Day method, in order to make NFP easier to teach, use, and learn.

School of Medicine and Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, the Institute has a solid foundation in scientific research. The Institute was formed in 1985 and has worldwide experience in NFP. The Institute's work is supported primarily by USAID and focuses on:

- Investigating and developing new NFP approaches that are effective, yet simple to provide and use.
- Improving and streamlining service delivery systems for NFP methods—to ensure that programs and users worldwide benefit from the latest available information and protocols.
- Assisting the integration of NFP into family planning and reproductive health programs.

Forge a Partnership with Us

The Institute invites program managers, policy planners, service providers, and researchers around the world to collaborate on joint NFP initiatives. The Institute has formed important partnerships with many domestic and international organizations to improve, expand, and evaluate programs that increase the availability, accessibility, and quality of NFP services. Some of these partnerships include:

- Conducting research and assessing needs to identify and evaluate NFP methods, efficacy, protocols, and service delivery approaches;
- Providing IEC and training materials, teaching tools, service delivery protocols, and MIS systems to support the delivery of quality NFP services;
- Assisting the integration of NFP services into family planning programs.

The Institute looks forward to collaborating with a variety of institutions in a global initiative to improve and expand reproductive health and family planning programs.

**HOW THE
INSTITUTE
CAN HELP**



The Institute's goal is to help programs improve and expand the quality and delivery of NFP services. The simple tools and techniques developed by the Institute are designed to make it easier for clients to achieve "autonomy"—the ability to understand their own fertility and use NFP without further assistance.

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