

What is involved in the calendar or app-based methods?

These include the calendar rhythm and the standard days methods, and involve calculating the fertile days using the dates of previous months' cycles. This method is best used after charting at least three cycle lengths.

- The first day of a menstrual period is counted as day one of a cycle
- Cycle length is measured from the start of one period to the day before the start of the next
- After reviewing three cycle lengths, select the shortest and longest cycles
- This method must be regularly reassessed, especially if the cycle lengths vary.

Select the shortest and longest cycle lengths, subtract 21 from the shortest cycle and subtract 10 from the longest cycle. For example, for someone whose cycle varies between 26-30 days:

Shortest cycle: $26-21=5$

Longest cycle: $30-10=20$

In this case, the fertile days are between days 5 and 20, and there should be no unprotected sex on those days. In a regular cycle the calculation is the same. For example in a regular 28 day cycle the fertile days are days 7 to 18.

Calendar-based methods alone are not very reliable, with 5 to 47 people falling pregnant out of 100 people in a year. It should be used in combination with other fertility awareness based methods.

How do I learn more about these methods?

If you are interested in using FAMs we would strongly advise speaking with a Family Planning NT doctor about whether it is suitable for you. If you want to learn more, you can get individual support from Natural Family Planning educators (www.naturalfertilityaustralia.org.au and www.natfamplan.com.au).

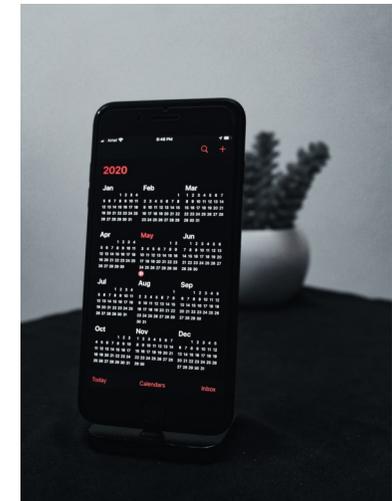
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Fertility Awareness Based Methods (natural family planning)



MISSION STATEMENT

Family Planning Welfare Association of NT Inc will advocate for and provide enhanced reproductive and sexual health and well being to all Territorians. This will be achieved through the provision of best practice clinical care and contemporary education and information services.



What are Fertility Awareness Based Methods (FAMs) of contraception?

FAMs (also called Natural Family Planning) are based on identifying the fertile days of your menstrual cycle in order to avoid a pregnancy.

How do FAMs work?

Sperm can survive in the uterus or fallopian tubes for up to 5–7 days but the released egg survives for only 12–24 hours. You are most fertile in the week before ovulation (egg release) until a day after ovulation has occurred. FAMs involve:

- observing fertile signs such as cervical mucus secretions, cervical changes and basal body temperature (symptoms-based methods)
- or
- monitoring the days of the menstrual cycle (calendar or app-based methods)

How well does it work?

The effectiveness of these methods relies on the motivation to avoid a pregnancy and the type of method used. Advice from an expert educator is recommended (see information at the end of this fact sheet).

If used correctly every time these methods are 75–99% effective. This means that if 100 people used these methods, between 1 and 25 could fall pregnant in a year. These methods are more effective the longer they are used.

Advantages of FAMs

- It is cost effective
- It does not change your bleeding
- It does not require hormones
- It can be used in combination with condoms during the “fertile days”

Disadvantages of FAMs

- It requires daily awareness of physical changes and continual observation and recording of signs and symptoms of fertility in a cycle
- May require long periods of abstinence
- It can be difficult to confidently predict ovulation
- It can take between 3 and 6 cycles to accurately identify fertile days
- Indicators of fertility can be changed by events such as illness, having sex and stress
- There is no protection against STIs (sexually transmitted infections).

What is involved in the symptoms-based methods?

Symptoms-based methods involve identifying one or more signs of fertility.

Temperature Method

Following ovulation, rising levels of progesterone will raise the basal body temperature (the lowest temperature taken on morning wakening) by between 0.2-0.5 degrees Celsius, which indicates ovulation is over. This will remain elevated until the next period. The temperature must be taken at the same time every day, either orally or vaginally but must be from the same place throughout the cycle. The basal body temperature must be taken straight after waking, before getting out of bed and before eating, drinking or any other activity. The fertile time ends when there are three consecutive days of recorded temperatures that are higher than the preceding six days. After this it is considered safe to have unprotected sex.

Things to consider:

- Accuracy: a digital thermometer is best
- Body temperature can be raised by a number of additional factors such as illness, alcohol, sleeping in later than usual, too little sleep, and electric blankets
- This method alone may require many days of abstinence

Cervical Mucus Method

This method involves the observation of the variations in cervical mucus secretions found at the vaginal opening. This can be used to identify fertile days because the hormone changes through the cycle affect the consistency of these secretions.

Mucus is divided into three distinct patterns:
1. Post menstrual infertile pattern: straight after menstruation the vaginal opening feels dry, or with a dense, flaky mucus that has a sticky feel
2. Ovulatory or fertile pattern: rising levels of oestrogen give a feeling of wetness. Mucus is becoming clear, more watery and elastic (a texture like raw egg white)

3. Post ovulatory infertile pattern: rising levels of progesterone cause the mucus to become cloudy, thicker and sticky and the vaginal opening once again feels dry.

Sexual intercourse can resume safely after three consecutive ‘dry’ days.

Things to consider:

- Possibly treat any bleeding or spotting during the cycle as potential fertile days
- Sexual excitement, semen or menstrual blood can mimic or conceal the effects of fertile mucus, making mucus interpretation more difficult

Who are FAMs suitable for?

People who have a strong preference for fertility awareness based methods because of religious, cultural or health reasons may find these methods suit them best. Partner cooperation is an important factor in the successful use of these methods. Some situations can make fertility awareness based methods more difficult to manage, for example:

- Recently stopping hormonal methods of contraception
- People with irregular periods or approaching menopause can have more difficulty in predicting fertile times