

Fertility Awareness

What is Fertility Awareness?

Fertility awareness is a group of methods that rely on understanding the menstrual cycle. Knowing your fertile days allows you to plan or prevent pregnancy without using any drugs or devices. Natural Family Planning (NFP) is another term for fertility awareness.

What makes Fertility Awareness unique?

Fertility awareness differs from other types of birth control. Birth control prevents sperm from meeting the egg. If sperm do not reach the egg, you cannot get pregnant. Fertility awareness tells you when you are most likely to become pregnant based on when your ovaries may have released an egg. These are your fertile days. Fertility awareness means you should avoid penis-in-vagina sex on your fertile days to prevent pregnancy.

Things to Know

Fertility awareness is a safe method of birth control. Fertility awareness is good for people who want to avoid drugs and devices to prevent pregnancy.

Fertility awareness does NOT protect against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). **Fertility awareness methods do not work well if you do not have a regular menstrual cycle.** Infections and some drugs can cause changes in vaginal mucus, making some fertility awareness methods harder to use.

Withdrawal or condoms can be used as backup methods during your fertile days.

There are many online apps that can help you track your fertile days (like Clue, Ovia, Glow, Read Your Body, Euki, and Natural Cycles). These apps may be free or cost money. These types of apps collect sensitive data about your health. Some of these apps may have data privacy issues you should be aware of. Make sure to read the terms of use before signing up. Learn more about how to protect yourself online with the [Digital Defense Fund](#).

Important Terms

Period – the days of your menstrual cycle when you have vaginal bleeding. Bleeding usually lasts between 2-7 days.

Menstrual Cycle – the length of time between the first day of your period to the first day of your next period. Most cycles are 28 days long. They can last from 24-38 days long.

Regular Menstrual Cycle – a regular menstrual cycle means that your periods are predictable. You get your period every 24-38 days with about the same number of days in between each period.

Penis-in-vagina Sex – vaginal intercourse (the penis in the vagina) can lead to pregnancy. Kissing, touching, anal sex, and oral sex do not cause pregnancy.

Ovulation – when your ovaries release an egg. This happens in the middle of your menstrual cycle. You are most likely to get pregnant on the days around ovulation.

Fertile Days – the days when you are most likely to get pregnant. To avoid pregnancy, you should not have vaginal sex on your fertile days. The number of days depends on the method used.

You can use one or more of the fertility awareness methods below to help track your fertile days.

| Method | How Well It Works* | What You Do | Fertile Days | Things to Know |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| Basal Body Temperature (BBT) Method <i>Natural Cycles</i> | 7 in 100 people using this method for a year get pregnant. | You take your temperature each morning before getting out of bed. Your temperature will rise by about 1/2 a degree Fahrenheit when you ovulate. | From the day your temperature rises until 3 days later. | Low cost You must buy a basal body temperature thermometer You must take your temperature each day You must keep careful records of your body temperature Using a smartphone app to track your daily temperature can help predict fertile days. Natural Cycles is the only app for BBT that is FDA approved. |

| Method | How Well It Works* | What You Do | Fertile Days | Things to Know |
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| Calendar (Rhythm) Method | ** | You track the number of days in each menstrual cycle to predict your fertile days. | First fertile day = shortest cycle length minus 18 Last fertile day = longest cycle length minus 11 | Here's an example: If your shortest cycle is 25 days long, subtract 18 from 25, which equals 7. This means the 7th day of your cycle is the first fertile day. If your longest cycle is 30 days long, subtract 11 from 30, which equals 19. This means the 19th day of your cycle is the last fertile day It works best when you have tracked 6-12 menstrual cycles. This helps you get a sense of your shortest and longest cycles Low cost No supplies to buy Smartphone apps can help You need to keep careful records of your menstrual cycles Learn more about how to use the calendar method from the Mayo Clinic . |
| Cervical Mucus Method | 4 to 34 in 100 people using this method for a year get pregnant. | You check the mucus in your vagina. It changes during your fertile days. Most days, it's thick and sticky. It becomes watery and slippery when you ovulate. | Your fertile days start when the mucus becomes watery and slippery. | Low cost No supplies to buy Smartphone apps can help You must check the mucus in your vagina each day The TwoDay Method is a variation of the Cervical Mucus Method. Check your cervical mucus at least twice a day. Then ask yourself two questions: - Did I notice any secretions today? - Did I notice any secretions yesterday? |
| Standard Days Method | ** | This is a simpler approach to the calendar (rhythm) method. You count the days during your menstrual cycle. | Your fertile days are days 8-19 during each menstrual cycle. | Low cost To use this, your period must be between 26-32 days long Smartphone apps can help You can use a tool like CycleBeads (a color-coded string of beads) to help you identify fertile and nonfertile days. |
| Symptothermal Method | 2 to 33 in 100 people using this method for a year get pregnant. | You use a combination of BBT and Cervical Mucus Method. | First signs of fertility (mucus becomes watery and slippery or temperature rises ½ degree) to 3rd day after the increase in body temperature or 4th day after the change in mucus, whichever comes second. | Low cost You must take your temperature and check mucus each day You must buy a basal body temperature thermometer |
| Urine Hormone Tests | 2 to 7 in 100 people using this method for a year get pregnant. | Track your menstrual cycle and do at-home urine hormone tests. | Hormone tests can tell you when your fertile days are. | You must buy urine hormone tests. These tests are typically used every day These tests use a dipstick or test strip to measure the hormone. Then it tells you if today is a fertile day |

*Typical Use

**There are not enough high-quality studies to show how effective the Calendar Method and Standard Days Method are in preventing pregnancy.