



Patient Information

Planning or Avoiding Pregnancy Naturally

Many women are interested in a birth-control method that does not involve hormones, the use of a device or a surgical procedure. Often, these women also want to figure out which days during the menstrual cycle are most likely to allow pregnancy.

These birth-control options are called fertility awareness-based methods. The Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University has developed two of these methods, the Standard Days Method and the TwoDay Method. Other methods are the ovulation method and the symptothermal method.

It is important to remember that these methods provide no protection against sexually transmitted diseases.

Standard Days Method

The Standard Days Method uses a simple, bead-based reminder system. It is appropriate for women who have menstrual cycles that last 26 to 32 days. Research has shown that ovulation occurs close to the midpoint of a majority of menstrual cycles, especially in cycles that are 26 to 32 days long.

Therefore, women with one of these cycle lengths are considered fertile on days 8 through 19 of the cycle. To prevent pregnancy, they should abstain from having sex or use a barrier method, such as a condom, during this time. The Standard Days Method is 95% effective with correct use and 88% effective with typical use.

A string of 32 color-coded beads can help you keep track of cycle days. The first bead is red and marks the first day of the menstrual period. You can move a rubber ring ahead on each day of the cycle. Beads two through seven and beads 20 through 32 are brown; you are not likely to get pregnant on these days. Beads eight through 19 are white; you are fertile on these days and likely to get pregnant.

If you know when your last period started, you can start using the beads right away. Otherwise, wait until your next period begins. If you are breastfeeding or recently used a long-acting hormonal birth-control method, ask your NP whether this method will work for you.

TwoDay Method

Menstrual cycle length is not an issue with the TwoDay Method. Women with menstrual cycles of any length can use the method, which relies on cervical secretions that determine when you are

fertile. Users do not have to analyze the characteristics of the secretions, just whether they have them or not. The TwoDay Method is 96% effective with correct use and 86% effective with typical use.

To use this method, look for cervical secretions each day — on toilet paper or underwear, or as wetness near the vulva. Then ask yourself two questions: “Did I notice any secretions today?” and “Did I notice any secretions yesterday?” If you’ve noticed secretions yesterday and today, you are potentially fertile today. But if you did not notice any secretions for 2 days in a row — yesterday and today — the probability of becoming pregnant today is very low.

Talk to your NP about what the cervical secretions might look or feel like. Also, be sure to wait several hours after having sex to evaluate the presence or absence of cervical secretions.

Ovulation Method

The ovulation method, which is also called the cervical mucus method or the Billings Ovulation Method, also requires you to look for cervical secretions. The ovulation method is 97% effective with correct use and 78% effective with typical use.

You must observe the secretions multiple times each day throughout the menstrual cycle to evaluate quantity and quality of the mucus (such as appearance and texture). You must then avoid having sex or use a barrier method on all days the method has identified as fertile. Talk to your NP about how to identify these fertile days by observing your cervical secretions.

Symptothermal Method

Women who use the symptothermal method must observe cervical secretions daily and take basal body temperature readings. It’s a good idea to use a thermometer that measures only from 96 to 100 degrees, so that it is easy to see when the temperature rises about 0.4 degrees. This elevation in temperature can be sudden or gradual, and it shows that ovulation has taken place.

Talk to your NP about how to chart your cervical secretion observations and basal body temperature readings so that you can identify your fertile days.

The symptothermal method is 98% effective with correct use and 80% to 87% effective with typical use. ❖

Some information from the Institute for Reproductive Health. For more information about the institute and its fertility awareness-based methods of family planning, visit www.irh.org.

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Additional Notes: