Planning Pregnancy Naturally

advance FOR Physician Assistants

Like many women today, you might be interested in a birth control method that doesn't involve hormones. If so, fertility awareness—understanding your fertility to identify when you're naturally more likely or more unlikely to get pregnant—might be right for you.

The Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University has developed two fertility awareness methods: the Standard Days Method and the TwoDay Method. Other methods include the ovulation method and the symptothermal method. Keep in mind that none of these family planning methods protect you from sexually transmitted diseases.

Standard Days Method

The Standard Days Method uses a simple bead-based reminder system. You can use this method if your menstrual cycle lasts between 26 and 32 days. Most women ovulate very close to the middle of their cycles, so if yours is 26 to 32 days long, you're considered most fertile on days 8 through 19 of your cycle. To best avoid getting pregnant, abstain from sex during this time, or use a barrier method such as a condom. The Standard Days Method is 95% effective with correct use and 88% effective with typical use.

A string of 32 color-coded beads with a rubber ring around one helps you keep track of the days of your menstrual cycle. The first bead is red, and it marks the first day of your period. To use the beads, move the rubber ring one bead ahead once a day. Beads 2 through 7 and beads 20 through 32 are brown, corresponding to the days on which you're least likely to get pregnant. Beads 8 through 19 are white, meaning that you're most fertile on these days and most likely to get pregnant.

TwoDay Method

The length of the menstrual cycle doesn't matter with the TwoDay Method, so women with cycles of any length can use it. The TwoDay method relies on cervical secretions to determine when you're most fertile. You don't have to analyze the characteristics of the secretions, just whether or not you have them. 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, either on toilet paper or your underwear, or appearing 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 noticed secretions yesterday and today, you're potentially more fertile today. But if you didn't notice any secretions for two straight days—yesterday and today—the probability of becoming pregnant today is lower.

Talk to your PA about what the cervical secretions might look like or feel like. And wait several hours after having sex to check for cervical secretions.

Ovulation Method

The ovulation method also requires that you look for cervical secretions. This method is 97% effective with correct use and 78% effective with typical use.

In this method, you'll observe your secretions multiple times each day throughout your menstrual cycle to evaluate their quantity and quality (such as appearance and texture), then avoid having sex or use a barrier method on all the days on which the method identifies you as being more fertile. Talk to your PA about how to identify more fertile days by observing your cervical secretions.

Symptothermal Method

To use the symptothermal method, you must observe cervical secretions daily and take your body temperature daily. It's a good idea to use a thermometer that measures only from 96 to 100 degrees so that it's easier to see when the temperature rises about 0.4 degrees. This slight increase in temperature shows that you have ovulated, and the temperature might go up suddenly or gradually.

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

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

Your physician assistant has given you this patient education handout to further explain or remind you about an issue related to your health. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, discuss them with your PA.

NOTES:

Institute for Reproductive Health
Georgetown University