

What are fertility awareness methods?

When you use the rhythm method, you track when you are “fertile” or most likely to get pregnant. If you avoid having unprotected sex while you are fertile, you are less likely to get pregnant. Some people call this method “fertility awareness” or “natural family planning.”

How effective are these methods?

If always used correctly, 3-5 out of 100 women who use these methods will get pregnant each year. If not always used correctly, 25 out of 100 women who use these methods will get pregnant each year. The rhythm method works best for women with regular periods.

How does it work?

You can use the rhythm method by keeping sperm out of your vagina on the days you are fertile. You are most fertile around the day your ovary releases an egg.

There are several ways to predict when you are likely to ovulate (release an egg). Your body changes in small ways around this time. If you track one or more of these changes, you can get an idea of when you are fertile. Tracking several of these together is best:

- Temperature Method — Take your temperature in with a special thermometer in the morning every day before you get out of bed. Your temperature rises by about 0.4°F around the time you release an egg.
- Cervical Mucus Method — The amount and texture of cervical mucus changes around the time your ovary releases an egg. Each day, check the changes in your cervical mucus. You can figure out when you ovulate based on these changes.
- Calendar Method — Chart your cycles on a calendar. Keep track of your fertile days.
- Standard Days Method — identifies a fixed fertile window in the cycle, days 8 to 19 every month for women with regular periods that come every 26 to 32 days. If you have your period monthly, your cycles are in this range.

When you are fertile, you have two options to prevent pregnancy:

- Do not have vaginal sex
- Use a barrier method like condoms

If you have unprotected sex on a day that you may be fertile, you should take emergency contraception as soon as possible within five days.

What are the benefits of using these methods?

- Fertility awareness methods are free or involve a small cost for tracking materials.
- Once you know how to use them, these methods are always available.
- If you decide you *want* to become pregnant, you can use one of these methods to know which days you are most likely to become pregnant.

What are the downsides of using these methods?

- The rhythm method does not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- You must be aware of your cycle and fertile days each time you have sex.
- Fertility awareness methods are less effective at preventing pregnancy than some other birth control methods.
- Some women don't have regular cycles. The rhythm method might not work for these women.
- Both partners must agree to use this method. They have to agree to abstain from vaginal sex or use a different method during fertile days.

Where can I get more information?

For more information on fertility awareness methods, talk to your health care provider. For detailed instructions on practicing fertility awareness, see:

- Temperature Method - <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/birth-control/temperature-method-22143.htm>
- Cervical Mucus Method - <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/birth-control/fam-cervical-mucus-method-22140.htm>
- TwoDay Method - www.cyclebeads.com
- Standard Days Method - www.cyclebeads.com