



Archdiocese of Philadelphia  
Family Life Office

# Natural Family Planning

*Responsible Parenthood and  
Fertility Awareness*



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**Natural Family Planning (NFP)** is a way of keeping track of your fertility through monitoring the various signs of a woman's body throughout each monthly cycle. The name "Natural Family Planning" is a bit of a misnomer because although it is a natural (i.e., not artificial) way of keeping track of fertility, it is not necessarily utilized as a method of family planning.

Some choose to use it as a method of family planning, while some choose to use it as a way of experiencing fertility awareness. What is fertility awareness? In a nutshell, it is an awareness and understanding of one's fertility. One can gain this understanding by learning about NFP and/or by charting one's fertility signs.

Fertility awareness/NFP has many benefits, including understanding one's body better, not harming one's body with contraceptive chemicals, and speaking a "language of the body" imbued with love and truth, by not putting artificial barriers between oneself and one's spouse.



*LIFE-GIVING COMMUNION*

NFP should not be confused with the "rhythm method." The rhythm method was used by Catholics for family planning purposes before the 1960s. It was a standardized way of counting calendar days to estimate when a woman's fertility occurred. The difficulty with this is that every woman's fertility is slightly different and can also vary from month to month, so this method did not work very well.

In the late 1960s, natural family planning was developed, which is a much more precise method of pinpointing a woman's monthly fertility.<sup>1</sup> Because it relies upon a woman's day-to-day bodily fertility signs (cervical mucus, temperature, etc.), it is much more specific and individualized to each woman, and there-

fore much more accurate than the rhythm method.

NFP can enhance the possibility of conceiving a child, or, with discernment and the proper intention, to space the conception of children. A woman experiences clear, observable signs indicating when she is fertile or infertile. The couple learns to observe and understand these signs, and shares responsibility for fertility awareness. Ideally, they also communicate and pray together regularly to discern God's plan for their family, in keeping with responsible and generous parenthood.

**A. Physiology of NFP:** There are many different methods of Natural Family Planning. Basically, most methods are either a form of the "Ovulation Method" (OM) or the "Sympto-Thermal Method" (STM). With the **Ovulation Method**, the couple just charts the woman's cervical secretions (mucus). When a woman's mucus is of the "fertile type," which is secreted around the time of ovulation, it is more stretchy and clear. When a woman's mucus is of the "nonfertile type," it is much less stretchy, and can be cloudier. With the **Sympto-Thermal Method**, the couple charts the woman's cervical mucus like with the OM, but they also chart the woman's basal body temperature by using a digital thermometer to take her temperature every morning before she gets up from bed. In conjunction with the mucus data, the temperature data can help them confirm whether she has ovulated or not, because a woman's temperature rises slightly after ovulation and stays a bit higher until the end of her cycle.

**1. Men's Body:**

- Fertile all the time
- Sperm life: depending on the amount and type of mucus in the woman's vagina, can live from a few hours to up to 5 days<sup>2</sup>
- 200 to 500 million sperm are deposited in any act of intercourse<sup>3</sup>
- Main hormone involved in fertility: Testosterone

**2. Woman's Body:**

- Have only a certain number of days each month during which they are fertile

- Egg can live from 8 to 24 hrs after ovulation<sup>4</sup>
- Average woman's cycle is approx. 28 days long<sup>5</sup>; can vary widely from woman to woman and from cycle to cycle in one woman.-Cycle length can change depending on stress a woman is under
- Main hormones involved in fertility cycle: Estrogen, Progesterone

### **3. Fertilization:**

- Occurs in the woman's fallopian tubes
- "Fertility window": is basically from when the egg is released from the ovaries to when the egg disintegrates. If a couple has intercourse during this fertile time, a child can be conceived.

### **4. Fertility Signs:**

- Basal Body Temperature*: rises slightly by about 0.4 degrees F after ovulation. The wife should take her temperature with a digital thermometer before she rises, at the same time every day.

#### *-Mucus:*

- Fertile mucus*: consistency is conducive to helping sperm live and move through it; appears more clear and stretchy.
- Non-fertile mucus*: consistency is not conducive to helping sperm live and move through it; appears less stretchy and cloudier.
- Cervical changes*: the cervix is the narrow, lower end of the uterus (womb). Women can examine their cervix as an extra check for fertility signs, by inserting her finger into the vaginal canal and touching the cervix. During infertile times of the cycle, the cervix remains firm, closed, and relatively easy to reach with the longest finger. During fertile times, the cervix opens, becomes soft, and rises a bit higher.<sup>6</sup>

### **5. Different Methods of NFP:**

Different methods work better for different families, and some families change methods at different times in their lives. No matter what the method, natural family planning can be used to un-

derstand the gift of fertility, to help diagnose health problems, to assist in conceiving a baby, or to prayerfully discern whether and how to space the conception of children. Here are just a few of the most popular methods, which are utilized in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia:

**-Sympto-Thermal Method taught by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia (developed by the Diocese of Harrisburg):** With this method, the couple charts both the wife's ovulation symptoms (mucus) and her temperature, to gain an accurate picture of their monthly fertile days. For more info or to register for a class, call 215-587-5639 or e-mail [famlife@adphila.org](mailto:famlife@adphila.org).

**-Creighton Model FertilityCare™ System:** This is an "ovulation method" system whereby the couple tracks only the wife's cervical secretions. This system is very precise, and is especially helpful for diagnosis and treatment of couples who might have issues like infertility, miscarriage, PMS, or postpartum depression. See [www.fertilitycarefriends.org](http://www.fertilitycarefriends.org) for more info or to contact local Creighton System teachers.

**-Couple to Couple League Method:** This is a sympto-thermal method, in which the couple charts the wife's cervical secretions and characteristics, and her temperature, to gain an accurate picture of their monthly fertile and nonfertile days. For more info or to register for a local class, see [www.ccli.org](http://www.ccli.org) and contact the Volpes at [jimvolpe@gmail.com](mailto:jimvolpe@gmail.com) or 610-337-1635.

**More methods of NFP are listed in the chart on the following pages.**



NFP Method	Type of Method	Contact Person	For Further Info
Archdiocese of Phila. NFP	STM (Sympto-Thermal)	Tara Plymouth (215-587-3516 or tseyfer@adphila.org)	Our FLO website ( <a href="http://archphila.org/evangelization/familife/nfischedule2009.htm">http://archphila.org/evangelization/familife/nfischedule2009.htm</a> ), our NFP brochures, or <a href="http://www.pnfpn.org">www.pnfpn.org</a> .
Creighton/ Naprotechnology	OM (Ovulation Method)	Each FertilityCare professional is an independent teacher, and can be contacted individually.	To find nearby FertilityCare professionals, go to <a href="http://www.fertilitycarefriends.org/11.html">http://www.fertilitycarefriends.org/11.html</a> or <a href="http://www.pnfpn.org">www.pnfpn.org</a> .
Couple to Couple League	STM	Jim and Jen Volpe ( <a href="mailto:jimvolpe@gmail.com">jimvolpe@gmail.com</a> or 610-337-1635)	<a href="http://www.ccli.org">www.ccli.org</a> or contact the Volpes.
Marquette Model	STM + Hormonal Monitoring via Electronic Fertility Monitor	(NOTE: There are no contacts for this method in the Phila. area.) Richard Fehring, Ph.D, RN ( <a href="mailto:richard.fehring@marquette.edu">richard.fehring@marquette.edu</a> or 414-288-3838)	Classes are online through a pilot website ( <a href="http://nfp.marquette.edu">http://nfp.marquette.edu</a> ); if couples would like to learn this Method and are willing to be in their pilot study, they can register at that website and can talk to Dr. Fehring.
BOMA (Billings Ovulation Method Association)	BOM (Billings OM)	(NOTE: There are no contacts for this method in the Phila. area.) Sue Ek (boma-usa@msn.com or 651-699-8139)	<a href="http://www.boma-usa.org/">http://www.boma-usa.org/</a>
Family of the Americas	OM	(NOTE: There are no contacts for this method in the Phila. area.) Mercedes Wilson ( <a href="mailto:familyplanning@yahoo.com">familyplanning@yahoo.com</a> ; W: 301-627-3346)	<a href="http://www.familyplanning.net/">http://www.familyplanning.net/</a>
Northwest Family Services	STM	(NOTE: There are no contacts for this method in the Phila. area.) Rose Fuller; 503-215-6377; <a href="mailto:RFuller@nwfs.org">RFuller@nwfs.org</a>	Classes are online through <a href="http://www.nwfs.org">http://www.nwfs.org</a> ; if couples would like to learn this Method online, they should contact Rose Fuller.

## **6. Charting**

With each method, the couple is taught to regularly and systematically chart the woman's fertility signs. This can either be done on paper, or some NFP organizations (for example, Couple to Couple League) can provide a charting software program to utilize for their own method of NFP. The couple also learns to examine the chart and to be able to interpret it, so as to identify the wife's fertile and nonfertile times of the month.

In this way, the husband and wife are mutually responsible for their fertility. With contraception, often it is only the woman who is held responsible for "taking her pill" or "putting her diaphragm in"; sometimes it is just the male who provides or makes sure to put on the condom. With NFP, there needs to be a mutual discussion about shared responsibility for fertility. The couple should ideally pray and communicate together extensively about what God might want with regards to their fertility at any given month.

Then, they utilize the day-to-day data about the wife's fertility to make decisions about when to have intercourse or to abstain.

## **7. Ecologically Friendly**

Ecologically friendly and environmentally responsible—it is a "green method" in that it reduces the hormonal pollution of the environment. It involves no contraceptive drugs or chemical hormones that can be excreted into the public water system. Discarded and excreted contraceptive drugs have been having harmful effects on the U.S.'s aquatic animals, especially fish. Like secondhand smoke, secondhand estrogens are being released into the environment and are causing harm to wildlife. In July 2007, the *National Catholic Register* reported on a study by EPA-funded scientists at the University of Colorado that found the creation of "intersex fish" with male and female features, due to estrogens and other hormones from birth control pills and patches excreted through urine into the public sewage system and then into streams.<sup>7</sup> NFP uses no such harmful toxins and thus nothing is released into the environment which can hurt the earth's flora

and fauna.

**B. Religious dimensions of NFP: *Growth in Faith, Trust, and Closeness to the Lord***

1. An especially valuable benefit of fertility awareness/NFP is that it can help one grow in one's faith. This can happen in many ways...The couple that practices fertility awareness/NFP understands firsthand the wonder of fertility—the cyclical nature of women's fertility, the abundance of gametes in the man, and that their bodies are made for one another, and for procreation, by God.

2. The NFP couple also perceives the importance of sacrificial love and self-control, since they work in conjunction with the body's cycles and practice abstinence when necessary out of love for the other person. This sets up a pattern of self-giving love that overflows into other areas of their lives, which brings them closer to an understanding of God's sacrificial love for us.

3. In working with the body's natural patterns, they also come to see that fertility, conception, and children are true gifts from God, and the conception of each child is a miracle. By living in accord with respect for their bodies, and by praying during each cycle for God's will with regard to conceiving a child, they foster a willingness to trust in the Lord's providence. They place their fertility in God's hands, and live each day in accord with how God has created them. This brings the couple closer to each other and to God.

4. NFP also allows the couple to speak a language of truth and love with their bodies. The spouses give themselves to each other totally and without reserve. This "body language" of total self-gift is in accord with the desires of the human heart to give oneself to another in full, and to receive another in fullness. It speaks of total commitment, openness to a future together, and full acceptance of the other.

5. *Conscience: To know and do God's will:*

*-Prayerfully seeking pregnancy:* When the couple prays and discusses their fertility and family situation, and concludes that God

may be calling them to be open to conceiving a child, they utilize their fertility data from their charts to endeavor to achieve a pregnancy. They then utilize the day-to-day data about the wife's fertility, and can increase their chances of conception by having intercourse during the times when the wife's signs point to fertility (stretchy, clear mucus; open cervix; and higher basal body temperature coincident with the mucus/cervix signs).

*-Prayerfully avoiding pregnancy:* When the couple prays and discusses their fertility and family situation, and concludes that God may be calling them to refrain from having children, they utilize their fertility data from their charts to avoid pregnancy. The couple should regularly revisit this decision prayerfully and honestly.

**Summary: Reasons couples choose to use NFP:**

- Because of their personal faith and conscience.
- Because they want their actions to align with what their Church teaches.
- Because they want a natural method, free from chemicals, devices, or surgeries.
- Because they view it as a healthier option, and might have had past problems with artificial hormonal methods.
- Because they want it to help them achieve a pregnancy, or avoid pregnancy, according to God's plan for their family.

**References:**

1. John Billings, "The Quest – Leading to the Discovery of the Billings Ovulation Method," *Bulletin of the Ovulation Method Research and Reference Centre of Australia*, (March 2002), 29(1), 18-28, <http://www.woomb.org/omrrca/bulletin/vol29/no1/TheQuest.pdf>.
2. John F. Kippley and Sheila K. Kippley, *The Art of Natural Family Planning*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Cincinnati, OH: The Couple To Couple League International, 1996), 88.
3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., 89.
5. Ibid., 91.
6. Ibid., 78-79.
7. Wayne Laugesen, "Contracepting the Environment: Birth-Control Poisoning of Streams Leave U.S. Environmentalists Mum," *National Catholic Register*, July 2007, [http://www.catholic.org/national/national\\_story.php?id=24681](http://www.catholic.org/national/national_story.php?id=24681).



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