

Advantages of FAMs

- There are no side effects.
- They can be used by women who are unable to use hormonal methods or women with religious concerns about birth control.
- Once you have paid for any necessary start-up costs (e.g. fertility beads, seeing a FAM consultant, etc.), FAMs are free.
- You learn about your body and fertility cycle.
- They encourage you to explore other kinds of sex during fertile times, such as oral sex, anal sex, mutual masturbation, etc.

Disadvantages of FAMs

- You often have to do something every day (e.g. mark something down in a chart, check your temperature, etc.).
- You will have to use another method of birth control or avoid vaginal sex with a man at certain times in your cycle.
- You have to feel comfortable with your own body.
- Like many forms of birth control, FAMs do not protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- These methods may not work if you don't have regular cycles.
- It can take time to learn and use FAM effectively.
- FAM consultants can be hard to find and appointments with consultants can be expensive.

For further information or to book an appointment:

For youth ages 13-29 - Planned Parenthood Toronto Health Services

Offers drop-in and scheduled appointments
Call 416-961-0113 or visit www.ppt.on.ca.

Teen Health Source

Offers anonymous and confidential sexual health information for teens by teens.
MSN chat TeenHealthSource@hotmail.com, email TeenHealthSource@ppt.on.ca,
call 416-961-3200 or visit www.TeenHealthSource.com.

For women - Bay Centre for Birth Control

Offers drop-in and scheduled appointments
Call 416-351-3700

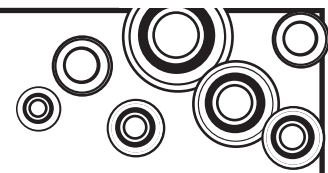
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Birth Control Options Series

Fertility Awareness & Preventing Pregnancy



Knowing about fertility can help you either avoid or achieve pregnancy. This resource focuses on how fertility awareness can be used to prevent pregnancy.

What is fertility?

- Fertility means the biological ability to produce children.
- Men* are fertile through their ability to produce sperm in the testicles and ejaculate. A man is fertile all day every day once he starts to ejaculate semen containing sperm (at puberty, ages 11-15 years).
- Women* are fertile through their ability to release mature eggs from the ovaries that can be fertilized by sperm. Women are born with every egg they will ever have. They start to release those eggs around their first period (at puberty, ages 9-14 years). A woman is fertile (can become pregnant) only on certain days in her cycle.
- Trans and intersex people may have different levels of fertility depending on what surgeries they may have had and what levels of hormones they may be taking.

What happens during the fertility cycle?

- A woman's fertility cycle (sometimes called the menstrual cycle) is the time from the first day of bleeding (her period) to the day before she starts her next period.
- While 28 days is often used to describe a "normal" cycle length, normal cycles can actually range from 23-35 days. Only 15% of women have a 28 day cycle.
- The cycle begins when a woman bleeds/menstruates (sheds the lining of her uterus). A period can last from 3-7 days.

*the terms men/women/male/female refer to physical sex not gender identity.

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- After menstruation, levels of the hormone estrogen start to rise and make the uterine lining thicken. At the same time, an egg in one of the ovaries starts to mature.
- Hormones trigger the release of an egg from the ovary into the fallopian tube. This process is called ovulation. The egg travels through the fallopian tube to the uterus and hormones continue to thicken the uterine lining to prepare it for a potential pregnancy.
- The egg lives for about 24 hours after it is released. If it is fertilized by sperm, it will travel into the uterus and attach to the uterine wall, becoming a pregnancy.
- There is no chance of pregnancy if there is no egg. However, because sperm can live in the vagina for up to 5 days, a woman is fertile for about 5 days before ovulation and 24 hours after ovulation.
- Women ovulate only once per cycle, although they can release 2 eggs in one ovulation.
- If the egg is not fertilized by sperm it will disintegrate, a woman's hormone levels will drop and the lining of the uterus is shed through menstruation, starting the cycle all over again.
- The time between Day 1 and ovulation can vary. The time from ovulation until the next period ranges from between 12-16 days. A woman's cycle can also vary from month to month.

What affects fertility?

- Most people do not know whether or not they are fertile unless they start trying to get pregnant or get pregnant unexpectedly.
- For men, the amount of sperm (sperm count) or the ability of sperm to move (sperm motility) can be affected by stress, family history, medical conditions, environmental factors and lifestyle factors (e.g. smoking, use of drugs and alcohol, etc.)
- A woman's fertility can be affected by stress, family history, illness, travel, rapid weight gain or loss, lifestyle factors (e.g. smoking, use of drugs and alcohol, etc.), breastfeeding and the use of hormonal birth control.
- Women's fertility declines with age and eventually their fertility cycle stops altogether, known as menopause. This usually happens between 45-60 years of age. After puberty, men produce sperm their entire lives. However, as they age their sperm count declines.

Women's fertility signs

- Women's bodies provide different signals when they are fertile.
- Cervical mucus is produced in the cervix (the opening into a woman's uterus) and comes out through the vagina. When a woman is fertile, the mucus becomes wet, slippery and stretchy (like egg whites) and helps sperm to swim up into the uterus towards the egg. Women who are using hormonal birth control do not produce cervical mucus that sperm can thrive in.
- Basal body temperature: a woman's body temperature remains fairly low when she is not ovulating. After she ovulates, there will be a small increase in her waking body temperature.
- Cervical position: when a woman is fertile, her cervix becomes softer, more open and moves up to the top of the vagina.

What are Fertility Awareness Methods (FAMs)?

FAMs are different methods that help women track their fertility/ menstrual cycle and identify their body's fertility signs to predict when they are fertile. If you are trying to prevent a pregnancy, all FAMs involve avoiding vaginal sex (intercourse) with a man or using another form of birth control (e.g. condoms, spermicides, the diaphragm, etc.) during fertile times. Examples of FAMs are:

- **Justisse Method:** this method involves keeping a record (charting) of your changing cervical mucus and your waking body temperature. For more information, visit www.justisse.ca or <http://www.redtentsisters.com/eco-contraception.html>
- **Weschler's FAM:** this method also involves keeping a record of your changing cervical mucus and your waking body temperature. Visit www.ovusoft.com.
- **Standard Days Method (SDM):** this method involves keeping track of the length of your cycle and assumes the time of greatest fertility is between days 8-19. A ring of coloured beads is sometimes used to help keep track of fertile days. Visit www.contracept.org.

Effectiveness

- Effectiveness rates vary for each type of FAM but can range from 78-98% effective.
- FAMs must be used consistently to be effective.