



West of Scotland Protocol

Approved April 2014

## NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING / Fertility Awareness Methods

### What's New

- Guideline updated based on FSRH Guideline 'Fertility Awareness Methods' 2015.
- Fertility Apps
- Information has been added on restrictions for use

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is a term used to describe fertility awareness (FA) indicators as a method of contraception used alongside abstinence of penetrative sex or use of barrier methods during the fertile period.

There are 4 main fertility awareness indicators that can be used alone or in combination to predict fertile days:

- Temperature
- Cervical secretions
- Calendar Calculations
- Changes to the cervix

Withdrawal is not recommended as a method of contraception on its own or as an alternative to condom use or abstinence.

Clients should be given appropriate information about the methods and useful contacts for instruction in their use. It is most effective when taught by a FAM instructor.

Summary of different fertility and urinary hormone indicators and methods

Indicator	Overview
Temperature	Basal body temperature monitored to identify when ovulation has occurred
Cervical Secretions	All cervical secretions monitored. Increase in secretions indicates ovulation
Two-day method	If cervical secretions noted on day of observation or the day before, sex should be avoided
Calendar/Rhythm method	Menstrual cycle tracked over >12 cycles and fertile window calculated
Standard Day method	Sex avoided on days 8-9 in cycles that are 26-32 days long
Symptothermal method (combined indicators)	Use of combination of above single indicators
Lactational Amenorrhoea Method (LAM)	Suitable for breastfeeding women only. See below for criteria.



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### **Efficacy**

Limited good quality evidence for efficacy of FAM so exact failure rate not known. With typical use, 24% of women will conceive within the first year of use due to method failure or user failure.

Perfect use of symptothermal method (combined indicators) has a failure rate of 0.4%

However, efficacy is dependent on the woman's age, how often she has sex and level of motivation.

Subjective symptoms of ovulation (intermenstrual bleeding, breast tenderness, changes in libido etc) should not be relied on as an indication of the fertile window.

### **Restrictions on Use of Fertility Indicators for Contraception**

- In women for whom pregnancy poses a significant health risk, the use fertility indicators to prevent pregnancy is not recommended.
- Women with irregular cycles may have difficulty using calendar indicators to accurately predict the fertile window.
- Postpartum period. Women should have three regular menses postpartum before changing to FAM
- Recent use of hormonal contraception. Women should not rely on FAM until minimum of three normal cycles after stopping
- Women using drugs known to be teratogenic should not rely on FAM to prevent pregnancy

Other medications (eg: cold remedies, analgesia, chemotherapy) may affect fertility indicators

### **Advantages**

FAM gives fertility control to the couple and can have a positive effect on relationships. There are no hormone-related side effects and is universally acceptable to all faiths and cultures. May be useful for women planning a pregnancy

### **Disadvantages**

With typical use, these methods are less effective than LARC methods.

It can take many months (3-6) to collect enough information to reliably use the method and normally requires daily observation, which might be affected by life events.

The period of abstinence can be long in some individuals and requires the couple's ability to modify their sexual behaviour

There is no protection from STIs.

### **Recommended Client Group**

Clients with objections to artificial contraception, often for religious reasons.

Clients wishing to avoid hormones or any invasive procedures.

### **Equipment**

Computerised devices which measures hormonal changes in the urine are also available and help predict the fertile period.

Computerised thermometers help to monitor basal body temperature

### **Other Methods:**



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### **Fertility Monitoring Devices**

Urinary hormone monitoring may be used to detect estrone-3-glucuronide and LH to detect the fertile window and women should avoid intercourse or use additional contraception during this time. There is a lack of evidence for efficacy of this method as a method of contraception

### **Lactational Amenorrhoea Method (LAM)**

Lactational amenorrhoea method can be used effectively in the postnatal period provided clients fulfil three criteria:

- Less than 6 months postpartum
- Amenorrhoeic
- Fully or nearly fully breast-feeding and not giving the baby any other liquid or solid food with no long intervals between feeds (eg: >4hrs during day and >6hrs at night)
- If all three criteria are met then LAM has a failure rate of <2%

The effect of expressing breastmilk on contraceptive efficacy is not known and it may be reduced.

### **Fertility Apps (eg :Natural Cycles)**

Apps are based on either a combination or single fertility awareness method, however, these are not recommended by the FSRH due to a lack of large-scale, independent studies to assess their efficacy.

A study of Natural cycles in 2016, suggests a typical use failure rate of 7% compared with 0.5% for perfect use.

## **INFORMATION SOURCES**

**Faculty of Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare Clinical Guidance- Fertility Awareness Methods June 2015. Available from: <https://www.fsrh.org/standards-and-guidance/documents/ceuguidancefertilityawarenessmethods/> (Accessed June 2021)**

### **Family Planning Association**

FPA website:

<https://www.sexwise.fpa.org.uk/resource/your-guide-natural-family-planning-pdf>

### **Sexwise**

<https://www.sexwise.org.uk/contraception/fertility-awareness-methods>

### **Fertility Care Scotland**

Website: [www.fertilitycare.org.uk](http://www.fertilitycare.org.uk)

Clinics in City Centre, Clarkston and Paisley

Tel: 0141 221 0858

### **Fertility UK**

[www.fertilityuk.org](http://www.fertilityuk.org)

Fertility Care will provide information about NFP, and direct clients to local tutors