

Fertility Awareness Methods (FAM)

What's New

- **If using calendar method only, users should ensure they have collected data from a minimum of 12 regular menstrual cycles**
- **Information leaflets have been updated**

Fertility Awareness is a method of contraception based on a knowledge and interpretation of the menstrual cycle and an abstinence of penetrative sex during the most fertile period. It is also known as natural family planning (NFP).

There are three main methods used to determine the fertile period:

1. Ovulation method observes cervical mucus changes
2. Symptothermal method records body temperature daily
3. Rhythm method makes calendar calculations of previous cycles

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

Appropriate information about the methods and useful contacts for instruction in their use should be provided.

FAM are more effective in combination with specialist training.

Those interested in using FAM for contraception purposes should be signposted to an organisation, service or local recognised practitioner offering teaching. Information is available on the [NHS Inform](#)

Efficacy

Observational methods measuring mucus and temperature have a failure rate of less than 1% with perfect use and the rhythm method a failure rate of 9% with perfect use. Many drop to 25% failure when typical use is measured. However, efficacy is dependent on the persons age, how often they have sex and the ability to adhere to the method. Efficacy is greater if more than one of the above methods are used together

Restrictions on Use of Fertility Indicators for Contraception

- Where pregnancy poses a significant health risk, the use fertility indicators to prevent pregnancy is not recommended.
- Those using drugs known to be teratogenic should not rely on FAM to prevent pregnancy

- People with irregular menstrual cycles may have difficulty using calendar indicators to accurately predict the fertile window.
- FAM should not be relied upon in the following situations until:
 - Postpartum: **three regular** menses postpartum
 - Recent use of hormonal contraception: **minimum of three normal cycles after stopping**
 - Calendar only: **information collected from 12 (regular) menstrual cycles**

Other medications (e.g.: 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 planning a pregnancy

Disadvantages

With typical use, these methods are less effective than LARC methods. It can take many months (3-12) 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

Can be purchased at most major chemists

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

Computerised thermometers help to monitor basal body temperature

Other Methods:

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 (except infrequent water or vitamins) with no long intervals between feeds (e.g.: >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 (e.g. 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](#) [accessed April 2025]

Fertility UK

Fertility Care will provide information about FAM, and direct clients to local tutors. www.fertilityuk.org [accessed April 2025]

[NHS Inform: Natural family planning \(fertility awareness method\)](#) [accessed April 2025]

Contraception Choices

[Contraception Choices: Fertility Awareness Method](#) [accessed April 2025]