



## Introducing Natural Family Planning

Anyone who lives near animals knows that there are days when female animals can get pregnant and days when they can't get pregnant. All the dogs in the neighborhood know when a female dog is in heat, because she has a special smell. If you want a cow to get pregnant, you bring a bull to her when she has mucus hanging near her tail.

Gardeners know that there are good days to plant seeds—and days when it's better to wait. Usually, you want to plant after the last frost and when the moon is in a helpful phase. You want the soil moist and rich in minerals.

Everyone knows that women and men are different. Women can get pregnant. Men can't get pregnant. Also, women are *fertile* in cycles. Fertile means able to get pregnant. There are days when a woman is fertile, and there are days when she is *infertile*. Infertile means not able to get pregnant. But a man can help a woman to start a pregnancy any day. Men are fertile all the time.

In the same way that animals and the earth give signs about their fertility, a woman's body gives signs about when she can get pregnant and when she can't. Every woman can learn to read these signs, which are part of her menstrual cycle.

Farmers think about the health of a cow before they bring a bull to her, and they make sure their soil is healthy and that the weather is right before they plant a crop. We can also trust women to know when they feel strong enough for a new pregnancy and to care for a new baby.

### A NATURAL SYSTEM

*Natural Family Planning (NFP)* is a natural system that tells women and couples when they are fertile and not fertile. It is based on charting the fertility

signs that a woman's body freely gives. This system is also called *Fertility Awareness (FA)*.

A woman has four main *fertility signs*. The first sign is called *cervical mucus*. A lot of women notice this mucus on their underwear, but they don't know what it is. Mucus can keep *sperm* (the seeds from a man that are needed to start a baby) alive for up to five days.

Usually, for about ten days every cycle, a woman makes mucus that can keep sperm alive. While she has mucus, a woman is fertile and she can get pregnant. During the rest of the cycle, a woman makes no mucus. Or, she makes a kind of mucus that can't keep sperm alive.

The second sign is the woman's *vaginal sensation*. (Sensation is another word for "feeling.") If a woman charts whether the lips of her vagina feel wet or dry, then she has another way to know if she is fertile. Usually, when her vagina feels wet, she is fertile. Usually, when her vagina feels dry, she is not fertile.

The third sign is the woman's *waking temperature*. She takes her temperature before she gets out of bed every day. Before *ovulation* (when the woman has a ripe egg that can start a baby), her temperature is cooler. After ovulation, either the egg is gone or a new baby has started growing. After ovulation, a woman is infertile for the rest of that cycle.

The fourth sign is a woman's *cervix*. The cervix is the opening to the womb. It is at the top of a woman's vagina. The cervix is soft, high and open when a woman is fertile. It is firm, low and closed when she is not fertile. When a woman is breastfeeding or close to menopause, her cervix can help her know when she is fertile and not fertile.

Natural Family Planning works by charting your fertility signs every day and by knowing how to read your chart. If you want to get pregnant, you know the best days to try. If you are not ready for a new pregnancy, you know the days that you should not have intercourse.

What I have written so far is just a start. To know when you are fertile and infertile, you will need to read this book several times. You may need to talk with a Fertility Awareness teacher. You will need to chart your fertility signs for at least three menstrual cycles and pass the test at the end of this book.

**MARK:** Shortly after we married, my wife and I had babies born a year apart. Our family was under a lot of stress. My wife felt nervous about getting pregnant again. She knew that if she got excited, lovemaking could lead to intercourse. So, sometimes she did not want me to touch her.

Then we learned that spacing our children at least three years apart gives them a better chance of being born healthy. We read a book about Fertility Awareness. We took a class, too. After charting three cycles, we know how to tell when my wife is fertile and when she is not fertile.

It's amazing! I see that spacing our children is best for my wife's health, and it's easier financially because the children are healthier. So I can wait to have intercourse, even though we are both more interested in making love when she's fertile. But I can put my desires aside for a week or so until she is not fertile. Just because she gives me a kiss, we don't have to have intercourse. Sometimes she just wants to snuggle. I trust her if she says she is not ready for a new pregnancy yet.

She is so happy that I listen to her and respect her. Sometimes she starts our lovemaking, when before it was always me. We have also learned there are many satisfying ways to be intimate besides intercourse. Talking is at the top of the list.

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