

# Natural Family Planning

## **How does NFP work?**

NFP when properly taught, helps a couple identify the most opportune time to achieve as well as avoid a pregnancy. By understanding that intercourse during the fertile time can result in pregnancy, couples using the natural methods must be clear regarding their family planning intention — that is, do they wish to achieve or postpone pregnancy? If a couple wishes to achieve pregnancy, they have intercourse during the fertile time. If a couple wishes to postpone or avoid a pregnancy, they abstain from intercourse and any genital contact during the fertile time. Couples who wish to achieve a pregnancy take advantage of the fertile time in their attempt to conceive a child. NFP allows couples to adjust their behavior to the naturally occurring cycles of a woman's body. It is not a contraceptive — i.e. it does nothing to work against conception.

## **As a family planning method, NFP:**

- Calls for mutual responsibility by husband and wife
- Requires the couple to communicate
- Is based on scientific research
- Treats each menstrual cycle as unique and teaches a couple to observe their signs of fertility on a day to-day basis
- Has no harmful side effects
- Is effective for those wanting to achieve or postpone pregnancy
- Can be used in special circumstances such as postpartum, during breast-feeding and premenopause
- Is virtually cost-free

## **What are the signs of fertility?**

A woman's body provides three basic ways to identify the fertile and infertile times of her cycle.

- A primary sign of fertility is the mucus released from the woman's cervix. A woman learns to identify the normal, healthy, cervical mucus which indicates the days that intercourse is most likely to result in a pregnancy. This is simply done by looking and touching the external secretions that come from the vagina.
- The second sign is her basal body temperature. Due to hormonal activity, a woman's resting temperature changes during the menstrual cycle. Lower temperatures indicate that ovulation has not yet occurred. Higher temperatures indicate a rise in progesterone which signals the end of the fertile time.
- The third sign of fertility is the change in the shape or texture of the cervix.

## **What are the benefits of NFP?**

In NFP both spouses are taught to understand the nature of fertility and work with it, whether it's to plan a pregnancy, space children or avoid pregnancy for serious reasons. Couples who use NFP soon learn that they have a shared responsibility for family planning. Husbands are encouraged to "tune into" their wives' cycles and both spouses are encouraged to speak openly and frankly about their sexual desires and their ideas on family size.

Other benefits include:

- low cost
- no harmful side effects
- effectiveness for achieving spacing or timing pregnancy
- can be used throughout the reproductive life cycle
- marriage enrichment and mutual understanding
- appreciation for the value of every child
- fosters respect for and acceptance of the total person
- morally acceptable

## **How effective are the methods of Natural Family Planning?**

When couples are taught by competent teachers and follow the rules of the methods precisely, NFP is highly successful in achieving the intended family plan. Numerous studies, including one by the U.S. government, have shown that some NFP methods can be used at the 99% level of effectiveness for a postponing pregnancy. That's equal to the birth control pill and far better than all the barrier methods.

*Reference: Contraceptive Technology, 17th Revised edition.*

*Robert A. Hatcher, Irvington Press: New York 1998.*

## **Who can use NFP?**

Any married couple can use NFP! A woman need not have "regular cycles". NFP education helps couples to fully understand their combined fertility, thereby helping them either to achieve or postpone pregnancy. The key to successful use of NFP is cooperation and communication between husband and wife — a shared commitment.

## **Is NFP morally acceptable?**

All the major religions including the Catholic Church accept the use of Natural Family Planning when couples have a sufficiently serious reason for spacing babies or limiting the size of their family. On the other hand, the teachings of the Catholic Church, some Orthodox churches, some parts of Judaism and an increasing number of Protestants are opposed to sterilization and the use of contraceptive or abortifacient drugs and devices. It should be noted that intrauterine devices (IUD), birth control pills, hormonal implants and injections can cause abortions as they render the uterine lining hostile to implantation of the fetus. NFP is unique among the methods of family planning because it enables its users to work with the body rather than against it. Fertility is viewed as a blessing, not a curse. It is a reality of life that is accepted, not a problem to be solved.

## **Where can I learn how to use NFP?**

The best way to learn NFP is from a qualified instructor – that is, one who is certified by a NFP instructor training program. For more information about NFP instruction available in your community, contact one of these organizations.

### **Sympto-Thermal Method**

#### ***Archdiocesan Office for Life, Family and Laity***

222 N. 17th St., Philadelphia, PA 19103

215-587-5661

For more information – email [famlife@adphila.org](mailto:famlife@adphila.org)

### **Camden Diocese**

E-Mail – [sj.nfp@comcast.net](mailto:sj.nfp@comcast.net)

### **The Couple to Couple League**

PO Box 111184, Cincinnati, OH 45211-1184

Phone – (513) 471-2000 nationally

visit their website at: [www.ccli.org](http://www.ccli.org) to locate local instructors

### **Medical Model**

#### **Creighton Model FertilityCare™ Services**

6901 Mercy Road, Omaha, NE 68106

Locally: The FertilityCare™ Practitioners of Southeast Pennsylvania

Phone – (215)884-2922 / (610)495-8821 locally

(402)390-6600 nationally

E-Mail – [pafertilitycare@comcast.net](mailto:pafertilitycare@comcast.net)

visit their website at: [www.creightonmodel.com](http://www.creightonmodel.com)

### **Additional Information**

#### ***Philadelphia Natural Family Planning Network***

P.O. Box 220, Jenkintown, PA 19046

**[www.pnfpn.org](http://www.pnfpn.org)**