

## NFP Basics; Assistance for Choosing a Method

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Natural Family Planning (NFP) is the general title for the scientific, natural and moral methods of family planning that can help married couples either achieve or postpone pregnancies. NFP methods are based on the observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's menstrual cycle. No drugs, devices, or surgical procedures are used to avoid pregnancy. Couples using NFP to avoid pregnancy abstain from intercourse and genital contact during the fertile phase of the woman's cycle. Since the methods of NFP respect the love-giving (unitive) and life-giving (procreative) nature of the conjugal act, they support God's design for married love!

A woman's body provides three basic ways to identify the fertile and infertile times of her cycle. Recognizing the pattern of those physical signs forms the basis for all methods of NFP. NFP is not the rhythm method as some may still think.

A primary sign of fertility is the fluid released from the women's cervix. A woman learns to identify the normal, healthy, cervical fluid which indicates the days that intercourse is most likely to result in a pregnancy.

The second sign is her body temperature upon waking. Due to hormonal activity, a woman's waking 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 is a change in the shape or texture of the cervix. Finally, secondary signs, such as minor abdominal pain or pressure at the time of ovulation can also be observed.

### **Help for choosing a method**

**There are two forms of Natural Family Planning offered in Bismarck-Mandan.** Ovulation methods (Billings, Creighton and Marquette) and Sympto-Thermal (Couple to Couple League and SymptoPro)

Choosing a method is based on personal preference. All methods are unique from one another, all take nearly the same amount of time to learn and all are equally effective.

### **A Simple Guide for Choosing a Method**

The following is a simple guide that may be helpful to assist you in choosing which method best fits you. Links to websites are provided for you (see below) to get further information on each method.

When choosing a method, consider...

- What kind of class setting are you comfortable with? Private instruction or a classroom style setting?
- What is your schedule, lifestyle and learning style?
- Do you have special health factors?
- What kind of client support expectations do you have?
- What kind of observations and charting suits you?

Below is a brief description of each method offered to you to choose from...

### **Ovulation methods**

The Ovulation methods are based primarily on the observation of cervical fluid to determine the fertile and infertile phases of the menstrual cycle. The Marquette Method uses a device to measure hormone levels to determine the fertile and infertile patterns.

#### **Billings Ovulation Method™**

- <http://www.thebillingsovulationmethod.org/>
  - Observations of the cervical fluid are noted daily primarily through what the woman senses at the vulva during normal daily activities and secondarily through the appearance of the cervical fluid. Couples chart daily the most fertile sign the woman sees each day to identify her infertile and fertile times.
  - Charting app available.
  - Taught by a woman or married couple certified to teach the method. Two options for taking the class:
    - One class, approximately three hours, followed by 2 individual follow-ups, usually 20-30 minutes.
    - Three classes, each one hour, with individual follow-ups scheduled before or after class.
- \*An entire class series (3 months) is required for pre-marriage requirement.

#### **Creighton Model FertilityCare™ System**

- <http://www.creightonmodel.com/> OR <http://www.popepaulvi.com/>
- Observations of cervical fluid are made daily by the woman when she goes to the bathroom. Couples chart daily the most fertile sign of the day using a standardized recording system to identify her infertile and fertile times.
- Medical evaluation by a physician training NaProTechnology [www.naprotechnology.com](http://www.naprotechnology.com) is available for couples who have difficulty achieving pregnancy or experiencing other reproductive health problems.
- Charting app available

- Taught by a FertilityCare Practitioner (woman or married couple). You begin with an intro session (1 hour) which occurs in a classroom style setting, followed by 5 private follow-up sessions (1 hour each). Additional long term follow-ups are scheduled to help the couple maintain confidence in using the system over time and to monitor the health of the woman's cycles. The intro session and first 5 follow-ups (6 hours total) required for a pre-marriage requirement.

### **Marquette Method**

- [nfp.marquette.edu](http://nfp.marquette.edu)
- Uses the ClearBlue Easy Monitor, a device used at home which measures hormone levels in urine to estimate the beginning and end of the time of fertility in a women's menstrual cycle. Can be used along with observations of cervical mucus, basal body temperature, or other biological indicators of fertility.
- Online charting available
- Taught by health professionals. In our Diocese it's taught by a nurse trained in the method.
  - \* 3 total sessions taught which include: a 2 hour introductory session, a 1-2 hour 2<sup>nd</sup> session (1 month later) of chart review, special circumstances and follow-up, and a private 3<sup>rd</sup> session (1 month later) with each couple.
  - \* All 3 sessions are required to meet the pre-marriage requirement.

### **Sympto - Thermal Methods**

The Sympto-Thermal Methods are based on the observation and interpretation of changes in basal body temperature, cervical mucus and the cervix to determine the fertile and infertile phases of the menstrual cycle.

### **Couple to Couple League**

- [www.ccli.org](http://www.ccli.org)
- The couple takes the women's resting body temperature upon waking. Observations of the cervical fluid are noted daily through what the woman senses at the vulva during normal daily activities and cervical fluid present on the tissue after going to the bathroom. Optionally, internal cervix checks may be performed in addition to the other observations. These signs are charted on a daily basis to help the couple determine the infertile and fertile times.
- Charting app available
- Taught by a married couple certified in teaching the method. Taught in a classroom style setting in 3-class series (classes are 2 hours each) with

additional individual chart reviews as needed. The entire 3-class series (6 hours total) must be taken in order to meet a pre-marriage requirement.

**Northwest Family Services/ SymptoPro™**

- <http://www.symptopro.org>
- SymptoPro™ is based on changes in a woman's cervical mucus, waking, and cervix position. These observable signs change in response to the hormones of the menstrual cycle. It only takes seconds a day for a woman to track her fertility; then the couple interprets the chart and makes a decision based on their family planning intention.
- Charting app available
- Taught by a trained instructor. A class series consists of three 2-hour classes that take place over the course of 6 weeks. Private follow-up is scheduled as a monthly courtesy for the first four to six months, or until the couple can chart with competence and confidence. The entire class series and one follow-up (7 hours total) must be taken in order to meet a pre-marriage requirement.

If you have questions or need additional help choosing a method, please contact the Diocese at 222-3035 and ask for Christie Collins, NFP Coordinator.