

Women Speak FOR THEMSELVES

FACT SHEET: *Fertility Awareness Based Methods and Natural Family Planning*

Disclaimer: Please know that the information contained in this fact sheet is not intended to replace advice given to you by your doctor.



Why The Need?

Women's desire to **manage the spacing of children, treat irregular menstrual cycle symptoms, or address painful physical ailments** is not a new phenomenon. Unfortunately, the primary answers women are now being offered by mass media, doctors, and peers alike all involve various kinds of birth control. Often promulgated as the golden ticket for women's equality and freedom, **birth control sells women short** when it comes to providing genuine health care, supporting fulfilling sexual relationships, or even achieving optimal family size. You don't have to be religious to come to this conclusion.

Oral contraceptive pills fail at a rate of 9-30% for women across the U.S.¹ Moreover, **the health risks of birth control can be substantial**. Research has linked hormonal contraception with an increased risk of depression² especially among adolescent girls. Using hormonal contraceptives can put obese women (38.3% of female adults in the U.S.³) at a greater risk for deep venous thrombosis.⁴ And these are just a few side effects associated with a few different forms of contraception.

The 40% dissatisfaction rate among women regarding their current form of contraception⁵ reflects that women want and need something better. Many women have experienced enhanced health benefits, enhanced relationships and intimacy, and **greater self-knowledge when practicing fertility awareness based methods (FABMs), known in some circles as Natural Family Planning (NFP)**. Women deserve to hear the facts about FABMs so that they can speak for themselves when it comes to their reproductive health.

Note: For the purposes of this fact sheet, the terms “fertility awareness”, “fertility awareness based methods (FABMs)”, and “Natural Family Planning (NFP)” will be used interchangeably.

FABMs Work

1. Modern fertility awareness based methods of charting have very high effectiveness rates, many of which are just as good as, or better than, birth control.

- Though sometimes unfairly lumped in with the much older, ineffective “rhythm method”, there are multiple modern FABMs that are reliable and rooted in science. When correctly used, FABMs have effectiveness rates similar to that of most contraceptives for avoiding pregnancy.⁶

¹ "Female Contraceptive Development Program (U01)." *National Institutes of Health*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 5 Nov. 2013. Web. 11 July 2017. <<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-HD-14-024.html>>.

² Skovlund, Charlotte Wessel, Lina Steinrud MÅrck, Lars Vedel Kessing, and Åjvind Lidegaard. "Association of Hormonal Contraception With Depression." *JAMA Psychiatry* 73.11 (2016): 1154-162. Web. 11 July 2017.

³ Ogden, Cynthia L., Margaret D. Carroll, Cheryl D. Fryar, and Katherine M. Flegal. "Prevalence of Obesity Among Adults and Youth: United States, 2011-2014." *NCHS Data Brief* 219 (2015): 2. Web. 11 July 2017. <<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db219.pdf>>.

⁴ "Female Contraceptive Development Program (U01)."

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Manhart, Michael D., Marguerite Duane, April Lind, Irit Sinai, and Jean Golden-Tevald. "Fertility Awareness-based Methods of Family Planning: A Review of Effectiveness for Avoiding Pregnancy Using SORT." *Osteopathic Family Physician* 5.1 (2013): 2-8. Web. <<http://www.factsaboutfertility.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/2013-Manhart-et-al-Review-of-Effectiveness-Osteopathic-Family-Physician.pdf>>.

- Some fertility awareness based methods are more effective than others. Users of the SymptoThermal Method seeking to avoid pregnancy on average experienced a less-than-one percent pregnancy rate with correct use, and between one- and just-over-two-percent pregnancy rate with typical use.⁷
2. **Women who use FABMs report being “highly satisfied.”**
 - A study done in New Zealand in 1997—which followed up with women during the two years after they were taught a fertility awareness method and became “autonomous users”—found that “the majority of subjects (> 90%) were highly satisfied with NFP use, with the most common reasons for satisfaction being self-awareness, freedom from drugs, naturalness and effectiveness.”⁸
 3. **Fertility awareness methods can also help couples struggling with infertility to achieve pregnancy.** One study of 342 couples found that 81% of couples using the Sympto-Thermal method to become pregnant did so in six months.⁹ Without using the method, couples took twice as long to become pregnant.

Health Benefits of FABMs

1. Unlike birth control drugs and devices, FABMs **are side-effect free.**¹⁰
2. FABMs help women track their unique hormone cycles which leads to a **greater knowledge and awareness of their overall health**, as well as reproductive health.
 - Charting using various fertility awareness based methods can help a woman and her doctor work to **identify the root causes** of experiences with premenstrual syndrome symptoms, infertility, miscarriage, and postpartum depression.¹¹
 - FABMs can help **distinguish between what type of ovarian cysts a woman may have**, which is essential to knowing whether surgical procedures or simple monitoring and progesterone treatments are necessary.¹²
3. FABMs help ensure **fewer surprises** about ovulation and menstrual cycles. Fertility awareness based methods can help women predict the onset of their periods which

⁷ Manhart, et al. "Fertility Awareness-based Methods of Family Planning."

⁸ France, M., J. France, and K. Townend. "Natural Family Planning in New Zealand: A Study of Continuation Rates and Characteristics of Users." Abstract. *Adv Contracept* 13.2-3 (1997): 191-98. Web. <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9288337>>.

⁹ Gnath, C., D. Godehardt, E. Godehardt, P. Frank-Herrmann, and G. Freundl. "Time to Pregnancy: Results of the German Prospective Study and Impact on the Management of Infertility." *Human Reproduction* 18.9 (2003): 1959-966. Web. 11 July 2017.

¹⁰ Liquido, Krizia. "Think the Pill Is Your Only Option? This Doc Believes You Should Give FABMs a Try." Blog post. Verily, 28 July 2016. Web. 11 July 2017.

¹¹ "Treating Disorders." *Natural Womanhood*. Web. 11 July 2017. <<https://naturalwomanhood.org/learn/treating-disorders/>>.

¹² Ibid.

then empowers women to take healthy, preventive measures that can curb the severity of their natural experiences of menstruation.¹³

FABMs and Relationships

1. Many couples fear that the periodic abstinence required by FABMs will harm their relationship. Yet, the most recent science shows that to the contrary, **couples using fertility awareness based methods report improvements in their relationship!** A recent survey of 2,560 users of the Sympto-Thermal Method of fertility awareness found that both men and women reported improvements:
 - “Large majorities of men (74%) and women (64%) felt NFP helped to improve their relationship while less than 10% felt use of NFP had harmed their relationship.”¹⁴
2. **Most couples remain satisfied with the frequency of sex**, even with the periodic abstinence required by FABMs:
 - “Seventy-five percent of women and 73% of men said they are either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their frequency of sexual intercourse.”¹⁵
3. Many couples say **using fertility awareness based methods has improved their sex life:**
 - “Among those in a relationship, 62% of women and 63% of men said that NFP improved their sex life while 37% of women and 25% of men felt it was unchanged from before they used NFP.”¹⁶
4. The use of fertility awareness based methods **opens pathways to communication and deeper intimacy.**
 - “Most women (69%) and men (72%) felt NFP has helped them speak about sexuality to their partner while less than 8% felt it did not.”¹⁷ As Gerard Migeon, Founder & CEO of Natural Womanhood put it, “If you can talk about sex with one another you can talk about anything.”¹⁸
 - Due to occasional periods of abstinence, couples **can create opportunities to love one another** by communicating love in different ways¹⁹ such as: spending quality time together, sharing words of affirmation, giving each other gifts, or doing acts of service for the other.²⁰

13 Liquido. "Think the Pill Is Your Only Option?"

14 Unseld, Matthias, Elisabeth Rötzer, Roman Weigl, Eva K. Masel, and Michael D. Manhart. "Use of Natural Family Planning (NFP) and Its Effect on Couple Relationships and Sexual Satisfaction: A Multi-Country Survey of NFP Users from US and Europe." *Frontiers in Public Health*. Frontiers in Public Health, 24 Feb. 2017. Web. 11 July 2017.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Migeon, Gerard. "10 Ways Fertility Awareness Improves Your Love Life." Blog post. Natural Womanhood, 11 June 2017. Web. 11 July 2017.

19 Ibid.

20 Chapman. "Understanding the Five Love Languages." Blog post. Focus On The Family. Web. 11 July 2017.

5. **FABMs can help couples know each other better.** For instance, charting may help a man understand how his wife's cycle affects energy levels throughout the month.²¹
6. **FABMs can help entire families communicate about healthy sexuality.** "Among those with children, 85% of women and 82% of men indicated the knowledge gained by using NFP helped them to explain sexuality to their children."²²
7. **FABMs help teens make better decisions about sex and relationships.** In a study that evaluated the efficacy of Teen STAR, a program for students between the ages of 12 and 17 that jointly teaches about fertility awareness and sexuality, it was concluded that the "tracking of fertility patterns joined to discussion of their meaning correlates positively with maintaining virginity as well as a return to chastity."²³

Resources:

- Facts About Fertility: <http://factsaboutfertility.org/>
- Natural Womanhood: <https://naturalwomanhood.org/>
- FEMM Health: <https://femmhealth.org/>

²¹ Migeon. "10 Ways Fertility Awareness Improves Your Love Life."

²² Unseld, et al. "Use of Natural Family Planning (NFP) and Its Effect on Couple Relationships and Sexual Satisfaction."

²³ Klaus, Hanna, Nora Dennehy, and Jean Turnbull. Rep. *Undergirding Abstinence Within a Sexuality Education Program*. Teen STAR, 21 Oct. 2001. Web.