

# Fertility Awareness Based Methods of Family Planning



## PATIENT GUIDE

*Fertility Awareness Based Methods (FABMs), also called Natural Family Planning, are methods of monitoring fertility to avoid or achieve pregnancy.*

### What are Fertility Awareness Based Methods of Family Planning?

- Ovulation is the release of eggs from the ovaries.
- Pregnancy occurs when **sperm fertilizes an egg**. Sperm can survive up to 5 days, while an egg survives 24 hours after ovulation, **meaning a couple is fertile for 6 days of a cycle**.
- FABMs help patients track the menstrual cycle and **observe various indicators** (cervical mucus, body temperature, hormone levels) **to determine** when ovaries release an egg every month (**ovulation**).
- The days surrounding ovulation are the most fertile days.
- People use FABMs to prevent pregnancy by avoiding intercourse on fertile days.

### Are FABMs Right for Me? Things to Consider:

- ✓ Effective use requires daily adherence and a supportive relationship.
- ✓ A busy lifestyle or deployment may make it difficult to track the necessary indicators to follow a FABM by tracking your cycle and fertility every single day.
- ✓ There may be a learning curve or financial commitment associated with the use of FABMs.
- ✓ They do not protect against sexually transmitted infections.
- ✓ To effectively practice FABM use, you must avoid sex during fertile days.
- ✓ FABMs may not be optimal for people with irregular menstrual cycles.

### Why some couples choose FABMs:

- ✓ Avoid use of hormones or devices.
- ✓ Religious or ethical objection to contraception.
- ✓ FABMs provide autonomy for family planning goals.

### How Well Do FABMs Work?

- FABMs work as well as other user-dependent methods (i.e., oral birth control pills/condoms).
- They are less effective than contraceptive devices (i.e., intrauterine devices (IUDs), subdermal implants (NEXPLANON®) or procedures.
- The more consistent you are about tracking your fertility signs daily and avoiding sex during fertile days, the more effective they'll be.

### FABMs are most effective when:

- You work with a nurse, doctor, or counselor who knows FABMs well to learn how to use them correctly.
- You have the time and discipline to check your fertility signs and chart your cycle every day.



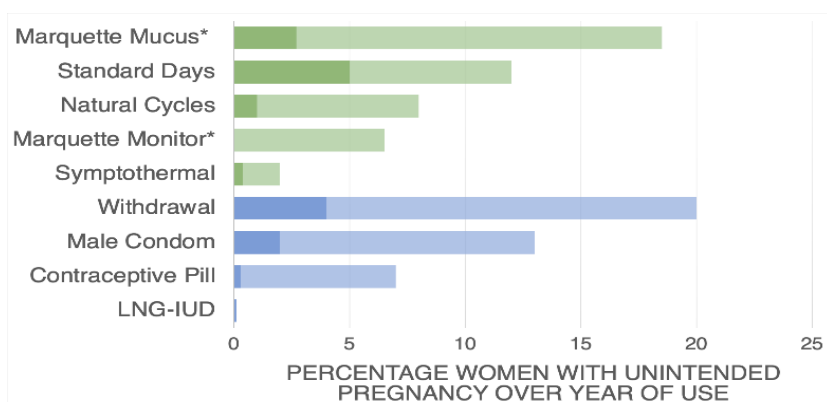
## What are Common Methods of FABMs?

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>Standard Days</b>          | <p><b>The fertility indicator for this method is counting calendar days.</b> It involves tracking your menstrual cycle consistently to determine cycle length (for this method it must be between 26 and 32 days). Once you've established that your cycle is in the range, one would abstain from sex (or use a different birth control method) on days 8-19, when you're fertile. This method is easy to learn, and you can self instruct.</p>  |
| <b>Marquette</b>              | <p><b>The fertility indicator for this method is hormones found in urine, the level of cervical mucus, or both.</b> These indicators are tracked with hormone readers like Clearblue© Fertility Reader. On the days where hormone levels are high or peak, patients should abstain from sex. This method is appropriate for those with irregular cycles. Given the use of hormone indicators, formal instruction is recommended.</p>  |
| <b>Creighton</b>              | <p><b>The fertility indicator for this model is the quality of cervical mucus.</b> Around the time of ovulation cervical mucus becomes clear, stretchy and slippery. A clinician can teach patients how to assess cervical fluid in a systematic way involving charts. For this reason, formal instruction is recommended. When cervical fluid indicates ovulation, patients should abstain from sex. This method is appropriate for irregular cycles.</p>  |
| <b>Sympto-thermal</b>         | <p><b>The fertility indicator for this method is the quality of cervical mucus and waking temperature.</b> In addition to evaluating cervical mucus like in the Creighton method, patients must also take their temperature when waking up every morning. Waking temperature is lower in the first part of the cycle and rises right after ovulation and stays high for the rest of the cycle. Clinicians can teach patients to chart these signs and identify the days of fertility. On fertile days, patients should abstain from sex. This method is not effective for night shift workers or individuals with irregular sleep schedules and is not recommended for those with irregular menstrual cycles.</p> |
| <b>Basal Body Temperature</b> | <p><b>The fertility indicator for this method is waking temperature.</b> Patients must take their temperature when waking up every morning. Waking temperature is lower in the first part of the cycle and rises right after ovulation and stays high for the rest of the cycle. Clinicians teach patients to chart this and identify the days of fertility. On fertile days, patients should abstain from sex. This method is not effective for night shift workers or individuals with irregular sleep schedules and is not recommended for those with irregular menstrual cycles.</p> <p><i>The Natural Cycles©App uses this method, although limited evidence is available to support its efficacy</i></p>    |

## Are FABMs Reliable?

**In the chart below, the narrowest bars are the most reliable methods.**

- The total width of the bar shows how effective the method is for the average person.
- The width of the darker bar demonstrates how effective the method is when followed perfectly.





## **Special Circumstances and FABMs:**

*These circumstances require additional considerations and should be discussed with a medical provider or FABM instructor:*

- Menstrual cycle length less than 22 days
- Menstrual cycle length 42 days or greater
- Recently discontinued hormonal contraception
- Spotting/bleeding during a cycle
- You may be entering menopause
- Postpartum/Breastfeeding

## **Postpartum FABMs (to discuss with your provider):**

### **Lactational Amenorrhea Method (LAM)**

*Breastfeeding alone prevents pregnancy for 98% of women meeting these criteria:*

- Child consumes only breastmilk
- Child is 6 months old or younger
- Menstrual cycle has not resumed

### **Marquette Postpartum Method**

*This method is similar to the standard Marquette Method, tracking different urinary hormones*

- An evidence-based method for breastfeeding and weaning
- Formal instruction recommended

## **Available Resources**

### **Your Medical Providers**

- Your providers understand the challenges active-duty service poses to your family planning.
- Schedule an appointment or send a message to your provider inquiring about local FABM instructional courses and support for FABM use.

### **Online Instruction and Resources**

- [Standard Days Method](#)
- [Marquette Method](#)
- [Creighton Model](#)
- [Sympto-thermal Method](#)
- [Basal Body Temperature Method](#)
- [FACTS About Fertility](#)
- [Bedsider Fertility Awareness](#)
- [The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists Fertility Awareness Methods](#)
- [Planned Parenthood Fertility Awareness Methods](#)
- [Cycle Beads](#)

*Some FABMs were developed through religiously affiliated groups & therefore instruction & resources may also be religiously affiliated.*

**Disclaimer:** Any linked material does not indicate an endorsement by the Department of the Navy