

CHARTING YOUR FERTILITY—THE EASY WAY

Many women find themselves in the position of wanting to become pregnant. Good healthy diet, a cessation of many foods and harmful substances, and good exercise will all help to ready the body for just that, but often a woman needs to know her body well enough to know when the most optimum times for conception will take place. Likewise, there are times when a woman may need to avoid getting pregnant. It is dangerous to conceive after a miscarriage, or in the event of a questionable lab result, or for some unforeseen health problems, and therefore it is wise to be able to abstain from intercourse during these times to protect one's body to give it time to heal before conceiving again in the future.

Each woman's monthly cycles are unique to her and may function like clockwork or fluctuate due to ever changing hormonal levels. What once was very predictable, may with increasing age, become ever more unpredictable, and eventually, as we reach menopause, cease all together.

Regardless of your cycle's unique aspects, you can with some regularity and assurance know when you are most fertile and use this knowledge to suit your family and its needs.

One must first recognize the phases of the woman's monthly cycle. The starting point at which we are all familiar is menstruation. The typical duration of menstruation usually lasts between 2 and 7 days beginning with a light brown discharge, moving to a heavy red bleed and then back to light brown spotting and discharge until it is complete.

After menstruation, there is usually a time of dryness when a woman feels nothing at the vaginal opening. The fertile phase of the cycle follows this dry spell and is marked with the appearance of the mucus secretion, which changes as the days go by. Another phase of dryness follows the fertile phase and will last until menstruation starts marking the beginning of a new cycle.

Now all women experience a difference in the number of days between their menstruation cycles. The difference occurs before ovulation and not after, as almost all women will begin a new cycle 14 to 16 days after ovulation. But many may ovulate early or late from the cycle preceding. (For example, one woman may ovulate 2 days after her cycle is finished, where another may not ovulate until 19 days after her cycle is finished. This accounts for the reason that some women have only 20 days between cycles and others may have 30 or more.

The way we will chart our fertility is by observing and charting the cervical mucus. Once the dry days are over and a woman begins to feel any type of wet secretions, she should note the changes in the mucus. At first, the mucus is sticky and dense and may be a slightly creamy color. As the days pass getting closer to ovulation (your most fertile day) the mucus becomes clearer, more elastic and fluid, and feels wet and slippery. The woman has a definite feeling of vaginal lubrication during this time. Then a change takes place and the mucus becomes cloudy and sticky. Then the wet, slippery feeling disappears altogether and the woman feels dry all day like she felt the few days after her menstruation.

It is the last day on which the woman feels wet and slippery, and where the mucus is very clear and elastic (like the white of an egg), that marks the PEAK DAY (day of ovulation—most fertile day) in her cycle. One is unable to identify her peak day until the day after when there has been a definite change in the mucus, and the wet, slippery sensation has disappeared altogether (there may still be discharge but it will be more sticky and dry and may appear white or gray in color).

One more thing that we must take into account is the breastfeeding mother. Typically, breastfeeding (if done EXCLUSIVELY and properly—absolutely no food (not even tastes here and there), no bottle feeding, no supplementation whatsoever, and keeping baby on a regular feeding schedule no longer than 3 hours between feedings) will temporarily stop the action of the ovaries and the breastfeeding mother will not ovulate. This is God's most natural source of birth control and when done properly, can last months and even beyond a year. It cannot however be counted upon and thus a woman must still watch her cervical mucus while breastfeeding if she is to know about her fertility. Most breastfeeding women will notice either a feeling of constant dryness or one of constant discharge (usually wet and sticky, but not stretchy like the egg white sensation of ovulation). A breastfeeding woman will chart this discharge a little differently, noting any changes at all in her discharge as it may signal the beginning of ovulation, even if menstruation has not yet returned. In addition, many breastfeeding women may begin to menstruate, but still not ovulate for several months.

Finally, we must look at the days when a woman is most fertile (or likely to conceive, Lord willing). Four days prior to the PEAK DAY and 3 days after the PEAK DAY are the most fertile times. Sperm from the man typically can only live for 24 hours, however, in the very welcoming environment of the cervical mucus, sperm can live for 72 hours or longer. There are little pockets in the cervix (called crypts) that can house and keep fertile a man's sperm for even longer than two to three days. Most women will ovulate or be most fertile on their PEAK DAY; however, some women actually ovulate two

days before or after their PEAK cervical mucus day. This is why there are several days before ovulation and several days after that are considered highly fertile days.

The ovulation (cervical mucus detection) method is a natural method, which does not interfere with your body's natural cycles or your health. This method is for a husband and wife who look upon their combined fertility as a gift from God to be cherished and protected, and if there is a need to abstain, look upon this abstinence as an expression of love and maturity.

Many have placed their fertility in the Lord's very capable hands, and thus, making love when you desire one another at any given point in a month is your goal. You are not concerned with fertile or infertile days and your life does not focus on these issues. However, you may need to work on some things in your life if you are experiencing infertility, such as your diet or exercise or adding the proper supplements to keep you good and healthy, so that you are able to conceive when God so chooses to open your womb. Or you may find yourself in a situation where there is a medical need to postpone a pregnancy. The Lord allows us the opportunity to keep our health up and for us to check our health status regularly. If He allows you to find a certain need that would suggest a benefit in waiting to conceive, it is wise to wait. And it is always wise to obey your husband if he feels the Lord is suggesting you wait to increase your family size as well. Whatever state you find yourself, the following information should be of benefit to you in knowing your body and fertility patterns.

To Achieve Pregnancy: Reduce intercourse to every other dry day once menstruation ends. Once the mucus begins, a steady daily diet of lovemaking should be desired. The first morning intercourse allows for the most motile sperm and usually has the best results. This daily intercourse should continue during all the wet days and 3 days after the peak day is noted.

There are some factors, which affect fertility. Weight should be maintained as extremes in either direction can cause infertility problems. Often times being as little as 10 pounds under weight can cause extreme infertility. Just putting on a few pounds can often get the pituitary gland functioning properly and may help a woman to achieve a pregnancy.

As mentioned earlier, good nutrition for both husband and wife are a must! This includes adequate food intake (following our Basic Diet Plan for good nutrition is highly recommended) of a well balanced diet including the proper vitamins and minerals. Eliminating caffeine, alcohol, and all drugs often is the one thing that helps male and female infertility. Coffee and daily soda intake are two of the biggest infertility culprits.

Adequate exercise provides a sense of well being and promotes good health; on the other hand, excessive exercise and diet may affect fertility adversely. Some find that decreasing the amount of running and jogging is helpful in attempting to achieve pregnancy.

And finally, stress is a significant inhibitor of ovulation and mucus production in women and it may decrease both the quality and quantity of sperm in men. Relaxing and trusting that you are doing all you can do to be healthy and then allowing the Lord to be in control of your body, is usually all one needs to eliminate the stress that we can place upon ourselves.

To Postpone a Pregnancy: If there is a medical reason or a reason that your husband has decided that a postponing of pregnancy is needed, then you must adhere to the following things.

First, YOU MUST AVOID ALL MARITAL RELATIONS ON THE DAYS OF MENSTRUAL BLEEDING! The reason for this is that the brain may send the signal to the ovaries earlier than usual and blood may mask the mucus, making it difficult for the woman to know that her time of fertility has started. In addition, there is increased information that it is medically unsound and unsafe to engage in intercourse during menstruation due to the increased risk of infection and endometriosis.

Second, YOU SHOULD DELAY INTERCOURSE DURING THE DRY TIME UNTIL THE EVENING OF EVERY OTHER DRY DAY. This allows you to observe your mucus throughout the day because seminal fluid can mask the beginning of the mucus. This is also why you must observe the every other day plan.

Third, AVOID ALL INTERCOURSE ONCE THERE IS A CHANGE FROM DRYNESS (AS SOON AS WETNESS APPEARS) UNTIL THE FOURTH DAY AFTER THE PEAK DAY. From this day on until menstruation begins, pregnancy is not possible and there are no restrictions on intercourse.

If a woman is breastfeeding, she must document at least 2 weeks of unchanging dryness or unchanging discharge before she can consider it to be infertile. After she is sure it is unfertile, she may observe love making on the evening of every other day of dryness or unchanging discharge (again making note of any change during the day). If there is a change

from dryness of from the unchanging discharge, AVOID ALL INTERCOURSE UNTIL THE FOURTH EVENING AFTER THE SAME PATTERN OF INFERTILITY (DRYNESS OR UNCHANGING DISCHARGE) RETURNS.

If you notice at any time a change in cervical mucus from dry to wet and slippery, even if you believe you had already reached a peak day, you should abstain from intercourse during this time and for three days following to be sure the mucus is gone and you are back to dry days again. Some women do ovulate more than once in a cycle.

It is very wise for the first several months following the ovulation (cervical mucus) method to consult with your midwife. You can go over any questions you may have as well as your chart to be assured that you are noting things properly to achieve the results you desire.

Charting Method (it is quite helpful to have small circular stickers of differing colors to mark your calendars)

- Menstruation – Mark each day of your cycle with a **red** dot. Note H (heavy flow), M (moderate flow), or L (light flow).
- Dry Days – Mark each dry day with a **brown** dot.
- Wet days, sticky days – Mark each of these days with a white dot (or a sticker or stamp with a baby on it)
- Peak Day – Place a **blue** star or dot on this day to make note of the most likely time of ovulation.
- 3 days following the Peak Day – Mark these days with a white dot or baby stamp as well
- Dry Days – Mark each dry day with a **brown** dot.
- Breastfeeding or Non-fertile mucus days – Mark with a **yellow** dot.

Always chart the days when you have intercourse. You can use a moon to indicate the evenings you enjoyed one another's company, and a sun (if trying to achieve pregnancy) when you enjoyed one another during the day. If you choose not to use a sun and moon, you can simply draw a heart on the days you have intercourse and mark N for night or M for morning.

For questions or for further information on supplements that may help increase your fertility or balance your hormones, please do not hesitate to contact us at His Grace Herbals and Midwifery in Va. Beach, VA at 757-479-1737.