

FERTILITY AWARENESS-BASED BIRTH CONTROL METHODS (FAM)

Fertility Awareness-Based Methods (FAM) allow you to figure out which days every month you are at risk of pregnancy (called fertile days). To avoid pregnancy, you cannot have sex on those days or you can use a barrier method of birth control (like condoms). If you want to become pregnant you should have sex on your fertile days.

There are different kinds of FAM, like

- Counting the days of your menstrual cycle on a calendar
- Taking your temperature every morning
- Checking the mucus from your vagina or cervix

How do I use FAM?

Each method has different instructions. If you decide to use FAM, ask your doctor or nurse for detailed information and instructions for the method(s) you want to use. Here are some details to help you get started.

- **Rhythm method** — To use this method, you need to count the days in your last 6 menstrual cycles. This helps to figure out when you are fertile (and when having sex has a risk of pregnancy).
 - The first day of the cycle is the day your period starts.
 - To figure out the number of days in one of your cycles, you need to count the number of days from the first day that your period starts to the first day that your next period starts.
 - Once you have these numbers, you need to do a little math:
 - Subtract 18 from the number of days in the **shortest** cycle you counted. (For example, if your last 6 cycles were anywhere from 26 to 30 days long, then your shortest cycle was 26 days. 26 minus 18 equals eight.)
 - Subtract 11 from the number of days in the **longest** cycle you counted. (Using the same example, the longest cycle was 30 days. 30 minus 11 equals 19.)
 - Those two numbers are the beginning and ending days of the fertile period. So, in the example, the fertile period starts Day 8 of the cycle, and ends Day 19. On those days of every menstrual cycle, you shouldn't have sex or you should use a barrier method (like a condom) when you do have sex to avoid getting pregnant.
- **Standard Days Method** — This method is for women with menstrual cycles that are between 26 and 32 days long – never longer or shorter. You should avoid sex or use a barrier method between Days 8 and 19 of the menstrual cycle. Some women use a product called Cycle Beads to help them keep track of cycle days for this method.
- **Basal Body Temperature (BBT) method** — For this method, you have to take your own temperature every single morning, before getting out of bed. You should write the temperature on a graph, and follow the instructions to figure out when you have ovulated. Your clinic may have graph paper for this, or you can get graphs on the internet. For the best protection against pregnancy using BBT, you should avoid unprotected sex from the first day of each menstrual cycle until you have ovulated.



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- **Cervical mucus (or secretion) methods** — These methods require you to touch your cervical mucus. The mucus changes at different times of the menstrual cycle. Around the time of ovulation, the mucus can be wet, stretchy, and slippery. Other times, it may feel drier or thicker, or you may not really notice any at all. The look and feel of the mucus helps you to figure out when to avoid unprotected sex. The Billings Ovulation Method is one example of these methods.
- **Symptothermal method** — This means using more than one FAM at once to reduce the chances of getting pregnant. It could mean using a cervical mucus method with BBT, for example.

How well does FAM work?

If a couple uses FAM perfectly for a year, about **5 out of 100 women** will get pregnant. But in real life, where it is hard to use FAM correctly all the time, **between 10 and 20 out of 100 women** using FAM will get pregnant in a year. This is a higher pregnancy rate than most hormonal birth control methods.

FAM may not work for you if you

- don't want to keep track of your fertile days
- can't avoid sex or use another method of birth control for at least 10 days during each menstrual cycle
- take medicines that makes it hard for you to figure out your fertile days
- have irregular periods
- have a partner who isn't cooperative
- are breastfeeding

Where do I go for more information about FAM?

- Rhythm Method: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/rhythm-method/basics/definition/prc-20013489>
- Standard Days Method: <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/birth-control/fam-standard-days-method-22141.htm>
- Cycle Beads: <http://www.cyclebeads.com/>
- BBT: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/basal-body-temperature/basics/definition/prc-20019978>
- Cervical Mucus Methods:
 - The Billing Ovulation Method: www.woomb.org
 - The Creighton Model: www.creightonmodel.com
 - General information: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/cervical-mucus-method/basics/definition/prc-20013005>
- Symptothermal Method: <http://www.fertilityuk.org>

