

# BIRTH CONTROL ALTERNATIVE

## What Is Natural Family Planning?

Natural family planning (NFP) is fertility awareness, which is simply knowledge of a couple's fertility. It is a means of reading the body's signs of fertility and infertility; applying this knowledge through the Sympto-Thermal Method (STM) is over 99% effective in postponing pregnancy. A



married couple's virtuous application of this knowledge either to try to achieve a pregnancy or to postpone a pregnancy is called responsible parenthood.

Practicing NFP is 100% natural — there are no drugs, chemicals or devices involved, which is one reason many today find it to be a positive and refreshing alternative to contraceptive methods. NFP honors our dignity as persons by respecting the natural rhythms and functions of the body. It is very common to hear couples who use NFP speak of an increased awe and respect for femininity and their mutual fertility, and a greater sense of empowerment through self-knowledge.

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## THE FERTILITY CYCLE

The female fertility cycle can be divided into three phases.

Phase I begins on the first day of menstrual bleeding, and normally includes a few infertile days after menstruation.

Phase II begins as soon as a woman's daily observations detect the onset of signs of fertility. This fertile time lasts up to and a few days after the time of ovulation (when an egg is released from the ovary).

In a normal, healthy woman, Phase II will typically last up to 12 days.

Phase III is the post-ovulation time and is a time of infertility.

Phase III typically accounts for the last one-third of a healthy woman's cycle.

The three phases of the female cycle are the result of the interplay of four key hormones – estrogen, progesterone, follicle-stimulating hormone and luteinizing hormone. These hormones are also responsible for the fertility signs that a woman can learn to observe.

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