

An Introduction to Natural Family Planning

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is not contraception. NFP gives a married couple a way to space out childbirths and limit the total number of children. But it does not give the couple complete control over procreation. Even when the couple prayerfully decides to limit their family size, or to wait before having another child, NFP is open to the possibility of life and to the will of God. NFP is used in a moral and praiseworthy manner when the couple, though making responsible decisions about family size, are still willing to accept an unplanned child from God's Providence.

NFP for a Just Reason: In most cases, a couple will use NFP only to limit the total number of children and to provide a space of time between births. They must have a just reason to do so, such as the limited resources of the family and the need to provide for existing children. Most couples today meet this standard and can use NFP to limit family size and space births. It is not moral in such cases to attempt to use NFP so strictly as to eliminate the possibility of conception. Using NFP with a contraceptive intention is immoral. The couples' intentions must be open to life and to the will of God concerning the procreation of children.

NFP for a Grave Reason: If a couple has a serious reason, they may use NFP very strictly, with the aim of avoiding conception entirely. Few couples have such a grave reason, which may include a significant risk to the health or life of the mother if she becomes pregnant, or a similar risk to the health or life of the child. All pregnancies involve some risk, so a grave reason must be well above the ordinary risk of pregnancy.

How NFP Works: Natural Family Planning uses the natural increase and decrease in fertility built into a woman's menstrual cycle to increase or decrease the possibility of conception. There are several different modern effective methods of NFP. Each identifies the most fertile time in a woman's cycle and requires the couple to abstain from sexual intercourse during that time, if they wish to avoid conception.

The Billings Ovulation Method uses observations about changes in a woman's body during her cycle to determine the time when she is most fertile. See Woomb.org and Billings-Centre.ab.ca

The Creighton Model is a modified version of the Billings Ovulation Method. See CreightonModel.com

The Sympto-Thermal Method relies on observations as well as changes in body temperature. It is more effective and more complex than observation-only methods. See the Couple to Couple League at CCLI.org

The Standard Days Method is a new method of NFP developed by the Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University (IRH.org). It does not use observations or temperature. It is an updated calendar method. The couple abstain from sex on days 8 through 19 of each cycle; cycles begin on the first day of her period, and cycles must be from 26 to 32 days in length.

The Two-Day Method, also developed at Georgetown, uses observations and a simple two-day rule. It is easier to learn than the Billings or Creighton methods, but somewhat less effective. See IRH.org

Ecological Breast-Feeding or the **Lactational Amenorrhea Method** is only used by mothers who are breast-feeding a newborn. It allows new mothers to delay the return of ovulation and their periods for weeks or months after a birth. It is the only NFP method that does not require periodic abstinence. See CCLI.org

Effectiveness: The effectiveness of any method of NFP varies from one couple to another. All NFP methods are significantly less effective for couples who do not follow the method closely. All NFP effectiveness percentages refer to couples who practice the method correctly and strictly. Different studies show different degrees of effectiveness; there is no single exact number to cite. A **95% method effectiveness** would mean that 5 out of 100 women, practicing the method correctly for one year, will get pregnant. Individual effectiveness varies. Older couples are generally less fertile than younger couples.

The Sympto-Thermal Method: ~99% effective (ccli.org/nfp/basics/effectiveness-p02.php)

The Creighton Method: >98% effective (creightonmodel.com/effectiveness.htm)

The Billings Method: >97% effective (woomb.org/bom/trials)

Two-Day Method: ~96% (irh.org/RTP-TDM.htm) **Standard Days Method:** ~95% (irh.org/RTP-SDM.htm)

Ecological Breast-Feeding (LAM): ~94% effective (ccli.org/nfp/ebf/spacebabies.php)

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