

The Joy of Natural Family Planning

What is NFP?

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is an umbrella term for certain methods used to achieve and avoid pregnancies. These methods are based on observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's menstrual cycle.

NFP is not "Rhythm." The Rhythm (or *Calendar*) method was developed in the 1930s. It was based on the scientific theory that ovulation could be predicted by calculating previous menstrual cycles. This method was often inaccurate because it did not take account of the unique nature of a woman's menstrual cycle.

Today's methods of NFP do take account of such variations. Based on observable signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of the menstrual cycle, NFP methods track the changes associated with ovulation and not only treat each woman as unique, but each cycle as well. The accuracy of women's observations has been validated by scientific research.*

The three most common methods of NFP are the Sympto-Thermal method, the Billings method, and the Creighton method. The Sympto-Thermal method records and interprets 2-3 signs of fertility. The Billings and Creighton methods focus on one particular sign. Fortunately, within the Diocese of Sacramento, instructors/classes in each of these methods are available. Steve Patton, the Diocesan Marriage & Family Life Director, has a very detailed list of available NFP instructors along with NFP links (http://www.diocese-sacramento.org/family_youth_young_adult/natural_family_planning.html)

NFP is a holistic approach to family planning. Both husband and wife understand their fertility, emotions, and family planning intention (*whether to have a baby or not*). Its successful use to avoid pregnancy relies upon a couple's following what they know about the method and one another.

Successful use of NFP requires a couple to communicate. In the daily charting of their fertility signs, couples quickly appreciate their shared responsibility for family planning. Husbands are encouraged to "tune into" their wives' cycles, and both spouses are encouraged to speak openly to each other about their sexual desires and their ideas on family size.

Couples using NFP to avoid pregnancy abstain from intercourse and genital contact when the woman is fertile and can conceive. The total days of abstinence will vary from woman

to woman and even from cycle to cycle. Whatever the length of the fertile phase, no barriers or chemicals are used at any time to avoid pregnancy. To achieve pregnancy couples have intercourse during the fertile time of the cycle.

NFP is not a contraceptive. It does nothing to suppress or block conception. Instead, couples adjust their behavior according to their family planning intention using the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of a woman's cycle.



NFP promotes openness to the transmission of human life and recognizes the value of children. Sexual relations are understood as

love-giving as well as life-giving. It is true family planning. Because NFP respects the twofold nature of sexual intercourse, it can enrich the bond between husband and wife. Indeed, it can be said that NFP promotes the understanding of "self donation" between spouses. For these reasons it is an acceptable form of family planning for people of various religious and philosophical beliefs.

We are holding classes periodically here at St. Clare. Please ask Deacon Carl about the next class (carlk@stclareroseville.org, 916-772-4717 X-105). **The class currently costs \$140/couple and includes books and all the materials.**

The next course begins on Mar. 17 and continues on: April 14 and May 19 2013.



NFP FAQs

1. Is NFP effective in postponing pregnancy? Several medical studies have concluded that NFP is 99% effective in avoiding pregnancy. It is just as effective as chemical birth control and more effective than condoms, diaphragms, and spermicides. This is NOT the old Rhythm Method!

A US Department of Health Education and Welfare Study carried out in Los Angeles from 1976-78 found the NFP effectiveness from 96% (ovulation method) to 100% (Sympto-thermal method).

The 1978 Roetzer study found an average NFP effectiveness from 99-100%. This is compared to effectiveness rates for the pill of 90-96% as found in a 1988 Ohio State University Study, and 97% as listed in the 1998 Physician's Desk Reference.

Several European studies (a2007 German study of more than 17,638 cycles from 900 women showed a 99.6% effectiveness rate; a1997 German study of 14,000 cycles of 750 women showed a 99.4% effectiveness rate; and a 1993 nine country European study of 9,000 cycles from 900 women showed a user effectiveness of 97.6%)
2. What is the divorce rate among NFP practicing couples? 5% (This figure is according to a 1995 Couple to Couple League assessment.)
3. What is the difference between avoiding pregnancy through NFP vice contraception? NFP works in concert with nature and builds virtuous living. Contraception deliberately frustrates a healthy body function for immediate pleasure. Contraception often entails a significant health risk and a marital health risk. Hormonal contraceptives can also induce abortions.
4. Is contraception really unhealthy? Yes. Sterilizations carries physical and psychological health risks. Hormonal contraceptives are a Type 1 carcinogen similar to cigarette smoking and asbestos (World Health Organization, 29 Jan 2005). A 2009 Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center study concluded a 40% increased risk in breast cancer for hormonal contraceptive users. The study also found if use begins prior to age 18, the risk of developing breast cancer is 3.7 times greater than a non-user. There are several other side effects, many of which are as serious (23 pages worth for the Pill!). Condom usage and withdrawal are the least effective methods and pose significant STD risks as neither prevent the most prevalent

STD— HPV. For more information on contraception risks visit <http://onemoresoul.com> or <http://ccli.org/nfp/contraception-sterilization/index.php>.

National Cancer Institute & the Mayo Clinic (2010): Being on the pill for more than 3 yrs prior to first pregnancy increases a woman's risk for breast cancer 52%

Journal of American Medicine (2010): Using [hormonal] birth control doubles ones risk of a stroke

A study published in the 1991 edition (vol. 15, issue 4) of South Sweden Cancer Detection and Prevention journal

5. If we practice NFP our marital relations will be adversely impacted due to periods of abstinence. This is not the common experience of NFP practicing couples. More frequently, the absence truly does make the heart grow fonder as it rekindles a courting period in the spousal relationship. Typically, the period of abstinence (if avoiding pregnancy) is roughly 10 days per month.
6. Why do some NFP couples have larger families? Isn't this a sign of ineffectiveness? Ask those couples whether or not the family size was desired or not before judging the method. [Also see FAQ #1 for studies on NFP effectiveness.] The increased communication required for NFP places family size at the heart of the marriage relationship. The topic of family size arises much more frequently for NFP couples. Also, love is generative. Often the result of the increased love between NFP spouses generates a desire to share that love with more children. To be clear, the Church teaches the decision of family size is between God and the husband and wife. Furthermore, the Church states that there are times when family size should be limited due to serious reasons. (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2368, 2370).



St. Clare contacts: Rick & Eileen Aaron
rickeileen@gmail.com or log on at <http://ccli.org/>

Or Deacon Carl Kube at (916) 772-4717

Mercy Medical (Creighton method) 916 614 2200

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(http://www.diocese-sacramento.org/family_youth_young_adult/natural_family_planning.html)