
Rhythm and Ovulation Methods of Family Planning

The rhythm and ovulation methods are two forms of natural birth control. Both of these methods depend on avoiding intercourse while the woman is fertile. For this reason, they are less effective than other methods. Approximately 20 percent of all women using this form of family planning become pregnant each year.

The rhythm method is based on estimating when you're fertile by keeping track of your menstrual cycles. You start by recording your menstrual cycles for at least three months, noting how many days elapse from the first day of one period to the first day of the next. Not all women have 28-day cycles, and cycle length may change from month to month. For this reason, you must make an average of your cycle length. That way, you can predict the first day of your next period.

Count backward 14 days to find the approximate date when you ovulate. Because sperm can live up to three days and because of variations in your cycle, you should avoid intercourse from five days before your ovulation date to five days after it (10 days in all). If your cycles are more variable, you must add even more days to this "unsafe" time.

The ovulation method of family planning involves one or more of several ways to pinpoint when you ovulate—by being aware of abdominal pains, body temperature, changes in your vaginal secretions, or hormone changes in your urine.

Upon ovulation, many women note minor pains in the lower abdomen for a few hours or a few days. If you detect this ovulation pain, it can help you identify your fertile periods.

Ovulation may also be indicated by a slight drop in body temperature. After ovulation, your temperature rises at least half a degree and stays there until close to the start of the menstrual period. Take your temperature every morning at the same time, before getting out of bed. Use a special thermometer called a basal thermometer, which covers only a few degrees around normal body temperature. You must take your temperature for a full five minutes, and keep a chart of your temperature for a few months until you can recognize the pattern.

Another way of determining when you ovulate is by noting the changes in your vaginal secretions. About three days before ovulation, the mucus becomes abundant and slippery—cloudy at first, and then clear like egg white. This is the fertile period. You must avoid intercourse from the appearance of this thin, slippery mucus through the peak day of wetness and for three full days afterward.

Finally, ovulation can also be detected by testing the urine for a hormone change that occurs about 36 hours before ovulation. This method is very accurate, but it's expensive. If you wish to use the ovulation method of birth control, you should first discuss it with your medical professional or the Ob/Gyn Advice Nurse at Kaiser Permanente.

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- Connect to our Web site at *members.kp.org*
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.