

## A Natural Way To Avoid Pregnancy

By: Patricia Deshane, FCP

Many couples may want or need to avoid pregnancy at some point before natural menopause occurs. Some common times when couples really take the time to consider their options of family planning are when they are getting married and when they are in the immediate postpartum after having a baby. Throughout a couple's relationship they often need to answer the question, "Is now a good time to get pregnant?" While it is a decision unique to each couple and family, the answer may be that it is best to avoid a pregnancy for reasons such as financial, health (physical/emotional), career/school, or other.

When a couple discerns (often prayerfully) that it is a time to intentionally avoid pregnancy (either temporarily such as for child spacing or permanently to limit family size), they must then decide *how* they will plan to successfully avoid a pregnancy. A doctor may only present the various methods of artificial birth control and may not mention natural methods at all. In fact, at my OB/GYN's office, they have posters on the bathroom walls and brochures on the counters in the exam rooms just so that patients can see some of the choices that they offer. The poster from ACOGNY [1] asks, "What's your style of contraception?," lists certain features of birth control, and then shows options from the most effective to the least effective. There is an empty spot in the upper left corner of the grid next to the words "most effective" in which I would love to write in the letters "NFP" as it is obviously left out of the picture (but yes, I know, NFP is not "contraception").

What is important here is that couples need to be knowledgeable about *all* of their options for family planning, especially to know that there are methods that are both *natural and effective* available. In fact, there are a wide variety of options to choose from in the realm of natural family planning (NFP) and fertility awareness based methods (FABMs) [2]. There are still many misconceptions about NFP today (even by doctors). At a recent appointment, my OB/GYN assumed that by using "NFP" that I was actually using the "rhythm method!" The modern natural methods do *not* simply "count the days" or use the calendar to estimate ovulation, but rather they are scientifically based and use the body's natural signs to tell whether a woman is currently fertile or infertile in her cycle. Knowing the days of the cycle that a woman is fertile does not only help her to be able to *achieve* pregnancy, but this knowledge can also help her to know how to effectively *avoid* pregnancy naturally. Essentially, a couple avoiding pregnancy would choose to *not* have intercourse on a day of fertility, which is a relatively short part of the cycle. (Yes, couples might not *like* periodic abstinence, but it is a season of sacrifice.) It is also important to note that withdrawal, condoms, the copper IUD, and sterilization (although all not hormonal methods) are *not* considered methods of "natural family planning." And the lactational amenorrhea method (LAM) is a specific method that can prolong postpartum infertility, but, in general, we teach that if *totally breastfeeding* (if *all* of the infant's nutrition is received from the breast), then *only* the first 56 days (or 8 weeks) after the baby's birth are considered infertile (and there are *no* guaranteed number of infertile days postpartum if a woman does not totally breastfeed) [3].

Just as it is good to know that there are natural methods for avoiding pregnancy out there (which often can get omitted in conversations with doctors) and to then know exactly what those methods are (and what they are not), it is so important to also correctly know how effective they are at preventing pregnancy. As mentioned, there are many different kinds of natural methods, so each has their own effectiveness rates. This is another area where a doctor might not have the most accurate information, especially if they rely on the CDC's effectiveness numbers [4]. On the CDC's website [5], they show fertility awareness based methods (as a whole) as among the *least effective* at 24% (that is, 24 out of 100 users avoiding pregnancy get pregnant within one year of use). However, in reality, the Creighton

Model System [3] used for avoiding pregnancy has a method effectiveness rate (perfect use) of 99.5% (method failure of 0.5%) and a use effectiveness rate (typical use) of 96.8% (so approximately only 3 out of 100 users get pregnant each year, a number which takes into account that humans make mistakes). Comparatively, the Pill's perfect use is 99% and typical use is 91% (so 9 out of 100 users on the Pill get pregnant each year) [5]. The Creighton Model System is as good as oral contraceptives and better than any other drug or device on the market [3]! In fact, more recently, the Creighton Model System has been determined to be *100% effective* for avoiding pregnancy [6]! The only other method that guarantees no pregnancies 100% of the time is *abstinence*. It does make sense that natural methods that practice periodic abstinence during the fertile times would be nearly 100%, especially with accurate observations of fertility. It is great to know that there really are truly reliable natural methods for avoiding pregnancy available. All we have to do is learn them with a qualified instructor (such as [7]), use them, and spread the truth about them.

### Resources:

[1] "What's your style of contraception?" poster from ACOGNY – <https://www.acog.org/-/media/Districts/District-II/Public/PDFs/LARCPowerWebVersionFINAL.pdf>

[2] "Natural Birth Control Methods" from Natural Womanhood – <https://naturalwomanhood.org/learn/natural-birth-control-methods/>

[3] The Creighton Model FertilityCare System - <http://creightonmodel.com/>

[4] "Petition the CDC: Women and medical professionals need accurate information on family planning" from FACTS – <https://www.factsaboutfertility.org/petition-the-cdc-women-and-medical-professionals-need-accurate-information/>

[5] "How effective are birth control methods?" from CDC – <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/contraception/index.htm>

[6] "Important Comments from St. John Paul II" from The Pope Paul VI Institute - [https://www.popepaulvi.com/PDF/appeals/2018\\_Spring\\_Appeal.pdf](https://www.popepaulvi.com/PDF/appeals/2018_Spring_Appeal.pdf)

[7] FertilityCare Centers of America – <https://fertilitycare.org/>