



Natural Methods of contraception

An egg matures and is released from the ovary once every month. This is called ovulation. Since both the released egg and the sperm that enters the vagina during sexual intercourse have a very short life span, pregnancy can occur only if sexual intercourse happens during this short time period.

There are many natural ways to identify when ovulation actually occurs. If the time of ovulation is recognized and sexual intercourse during this period is avoided, pregnancy can be prevented without the use of any medicine, device or surgery. **These are therefore called “natural” methods of contraception. Some of these methods are described below in detail.**

Basal body temperature method

Around the period of ovulation, there is an increase in the woman's body temperature of about 0.5 degree Celsius. In this method, the period of ovulation is identified through this change in body temperature and pregnancy is prevented by avoiding sexual intercourse around that time.

The woman should measure her body temperature using a thermometer every day as soon as she wakes up in the morning, before eating or drinking anything.

This is to be plotted graphically on-paper. Just before ovulation, the temperature dips, then increases. Ovulation can be identified to occur on the day the temperature suddenly increases. Sexual intercourse should be avoided on that day and on the subsequent two days.

Disadvantages

- Many women may find it difficult to use a thermometer every day and plot their temperature.
- Sperms remain alive in the female reproductive tract for 48 hours. Having an intercourse on the day before ovulation can also therefore result in conception.
- Other reasons for a rise in temperature, such as fever, can lead to difficulties in interpreting temperature changes.
- This may not be a suitable method for women with irregular menstrual cycles.

■ Cervical mucus method

There is constant secretion of a mucus like substance from the cervix of the uterus. The nature and consistency of these secretions vary over different days of the menstrual cycle. On some days, the secretions may be thick and on other days, sticky and glue-like.

In this method, the woman checks the nature of the cervical secretions by inserting two fingers into her vagina. On some days, the mucus will stretch between the two fingers like a thread; on other days, it will not. The chances of conception are higher on the days when the secretions are thread-like and intercourse should be avoided on these days.



Withdrawal method

In this method, the man withdraws his penis from the vagina during sexual intercourse just before ejaculation occurs. Thus, sperms do not enter the vagina and pregnancy cannot occur. However, this method is completely dependent on the man and requires tremendous self-control. Reportedly, it is the most commonly used method in India. The penis should be withdrawn before ejaculation. Even if there is a small delay and a small drop of semen enters the vagina, pregnancy may occur.

Lactational Amenorrhea Method

For a few months after childbirth, a woman is naturally infertile or incapable of having a pregnancy. During this period, the woman does not menstruate, and ovulation does not occur.

There is a strong association between breast feeding and such infertility after childbirth. If a woman does not breast feed, she resumes her menstrual cycles in about two months. But women who breast feed usually resume their cycles only after 6-8 months.

It is a scientifically proven fact that breast feeding delays ovulation and resumption of menstrual cycles.

Who is this method suitable for?

This method is suitable for women in whom all of the following three conditions are met.

- Childbirth has occurred within the last 6 months.
- The woman has not started having periods since childbirth.
- She is exclusively breast feeding day and night.

Even if one of these conditions is not met, this method is not appropriate, that is, the woman has a chance of becoming pregnant. It is best to use an alternative method of contraception under such circumstances.

Calendar method

An egg is released from the ovary once each month. Accordingly, if one avoids sexual intercourse from one day before ovulation till five days after ovulation, (a total of seven days), it is possible to prevent pregnancy.

How to calculate the fertile days

Women who have regular cycles and have a period regularly once in 28 days can prevent pregnancy by avoiding intercourse between the 10th and 17th days of their cycle (calculated from the first day of the period). Women who have irregular periods cannot follow this calculation and this method may not be appropriate for them. However, if the dates of the menstrual cycle are carefully noted down every month for 12 months, this method could be used successfully.

Look at the table below. A woman has noted down the date of the beginning her period for 12 months. In the twelve- month period, the shortest menstrual cycle was of 21 days and the longest, 24 days.

Sample Table of a woman's menstrual cycle

Month	Date periods arrived	Days between menstrual periods	Month	Date periods arrived	Days between menstrual periods
January	4, 26	22 days	July	4, 26	24, 22 days
February	19	23 days	August	16	21 days
March	10	21 days	September	7, 30	22, 23 days
April	1, 25	22, 24 days	October	24	24 days
May	17	22 days	November	15	22 days
Jun	10	23 days	December	6, 27	4, 21 days

Calculating the safe period:

The first day the intercourse has to be avoided

= Duration of shortest cycle minus 18 days

The last day the intercourse has to be avoided

= Duration of longest cycle minus 11 days

For the woman whose cycle is depicted in the table, the shortest cycle is of 21 days and the longest 24 days. Therefore,

The first day for avoiding intercourse is $21 - 18 = 3$

The last day for avoiding intercourse is $24 - 11 = 13$

Thus, this woman has to avoid intercourse from the third day of her cycle (calculated from the first day of the period) till the 13th day.

Based on the calculations shown above, the following table depicts the days intercourse has to be avoided for different lengths of the shortest and longest cycle.

Shortest cycle	First day to prevent	Longest cycle	Last day to prevent
21	3	21	10
22	4	22	11
23	5	23	12
24	6	24	13
25	7	25	14
26	8	26	15
27	9	27	16
28	10	28	17
29	11	29	18
30	12	30	19
31	13	31	20
32	14	32	21
33	15	33	22
34	16	34	23
35	17	35	24
36	18	36	25
37	19	37	26
38	20	38	27

Let us assume that a woman's shortest cycle is 23 days and the longest cycle is 28 days. In the table above, the corresponding number for shortest cycle of 23 days is number five and for longest cycle of 28 days is number 17. Based on this, sexual intercourse should be avoided from the fifth day after the menstrual cycle has begun upto the 17th day.

This method does not require any money to be spent and is free of side effects. The downside is that pregnancy can occur if calculations go wrong.

Natural methods
are used to identify the period
of ovulation and avoid intercourse
around that period to prevent pregnancy.



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