



What is Natural Family Planning?

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is an umbrella term for certain methods used to achieve and postpone pregnancies. These methods are based on the observation of naturally occurring signs of the fertile phase of a woman's fertility cycle. No drugs, devices or surgical procedures are used in the practice of NFP.

NFP reflects the dignity of the human person within the context of marriage and family life, promotes openness to life, and recognizes the value of every child. By respecting the love-giving and life-giving natures of marriage, NFP enriches the bond between husband and wife.

Is NFP Rhythm?

NFP is not "Rhythm."

The Rhythm or calendar method was in use more than 50 years ago. Modern NFP is based on over 30 years of scientific research on human fertility. These methods are based on the day-to-day observations of naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of the woman's menstrual cycle.

Who can use NFP?

Any married couple can use NFP! A woman need not have "regular cycles." NFP education helps couples to fully understand their combined fertility, thereby helping them either to achieve or postpone pregnancy. The key to successful use of NFP is cooperation, shared commitment, and communication between husband and wife.

Is NFP morally acceptable?

All major religions including the Catholic Church accept the use of natural family planning to avoid pregnancy when couples have a sufficiently serious reason for spacing babies or limiting family size.

Also, the Catholic Church, some Orthodox churches, some parts of Judaism and an increasing number of Protestants are opposed to sterilization and the use of drugs and devices for contraception or abortion. It should be noted that intrauterine devices (IUD), birth control pills, hormonal implants and injections can cause abortions as they render the uterine lining hostile to implantation of the embryo.

NFP is unique among the methods of family planning because it enables its users to work with the body rather than against it. Fertility is viewed as a blessing, not a curse, a reality of life that is accepted, not a problem to be solved.

What are the benefits of using NFP?

With NFP both spouses are taught to understand the nature of fertility and work with it, whether it's to plan a pregnancy, space children, or avoid pregnancy for serious reasons. How effective are the methods of natural family planning?

When couples are taught by a competent teacher and follow the rules of the method carefully, NFP is highly successful in achieving their intended family plan. Numerous studies, including one by the U.S. government, have shown that the most common NFP methods are 97-99% effective for avoiding pregnancy. That's as effective as the birth control pill and far more effective than barrier methods. This means that among couples who are well taught in NFP, who have made a clear decision to postpone pregnancy, who understand the rules for avoiding pregnancy and follow them carefully, no more than 3% of these couples will experience pregnancy in a one year period.

Reference: *Contraceptive Technology*, 17th Revised edition. Robert A. Hatcher, Irvington Press: New York 1998.