

Chapter 8

FERTILITY AWARENESS-BASED METHODS

WHAT ARE FERTILITY-AWARENESS BASED METHODS?

Fertility awareness-based (FAB) contraceptive methods are based on the recognition of the beginning and end of the fertile period of a woman's menstrual cycle. Sometimes called periodic abstinence or natural family planning (NFP), these methods require abstaining from sexual intercourse during the fertile phase to avoid conception. The success of these methods depends on the woman's ability to identify the fertile phase of each menstrual cycle, the competence of the teacher– provider, and the couples' motivation and discipline to practice abstinence when required. FAB methods provide an alternative for women who want to use natural methods for medical, religious, or personal reasons.

FAB methods include the following:

- Calendar-based methods
These methods keep track of the days of the menstrual cycle to identify the start and end of the fertile period. The two calendar-based methods are the calendar rhythm method and the Standard Days Method (SDM). The SDM is the only DOH-recommended method.
- Symptoms-based methods
These methods depend on observing signs of fertility (cervical mucus or Billings Ovulation Method, Two-Day Method, basal body temperature [BBT] method, and symptothermal method).

HOW DO FAB METHODS WORK?

- FAB methods use one or more indicators to identify the start and end of the fertile period during a menstrual cycle.
- Practicing abstinence during the fertile period prevents pregnancy.
- Support and cooperation of the partner are necessary for the correct use of the method.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF FAB METHODS?

- Can be used either to avoid pregnancy or to become pregnant
- No physical side effects
- Very little or no cost
- Immediately reversible
- Acceptable for some religious groups that reject or discourage the use of other methods
- No hormonal side effects
- Involves men and encourages responsibility on FP
- Educates couple about women's fertility cycles

WHAT ARE THE DISADVANTAGES OF FAB METHODS?

- May inhibit sexual spontaneity
- Difficult to practice (abstinence) on fertile days for some couples
- Will not work without continuing cooperation and commitment of the couple
- Requires consistent and accurate record keeping on body changes
- Can become unreliable or difficult to use when menstrual cycle length is short, long,

or irregular; when fertility signs and symptoms are affected by illness; or when users are apprehensive or find difficulties in following instructions

- Does not protect against sexually transmitted infections, including human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/autoimmune deficiency syndrome (AIDS)

HOW EFFECTIVE ARE FAB METHODS?

The effectiveness of FAB methods depends on the user. The risk of pregnancy is greatest when couples have sex on fertile days without using a backup method.

When typically used, about 25 per 100 women who use periodic abstinence become pregnant over the first year of use. The pregnancy rates for the typical use of specific FAB methods are not available. Table 16 shows the pregnancy rates for the consistent and correct use of FAB methods and abstinence on fertile days.

Table 16. Pregnancy rates with consistent and correct use and abstinence on fertile days	
Method	Pregnancies per 100 Women Over the First Year
Standard Days Method	5
Calendar Rhythm method	9
Two-Day Method	4
Basal Body Temperature (BBT) Method	1
Billings Ovulation Method	3
Symptothermal Method	2

Source: Family Planning: A Global Handbook for Providers WHO 2011

HOW MANY DAYS SHOULD A WOMAN ABSTAIN OR USE ANOTHER METHOD BEFORE SHE CAN EFFECTIVELY USE EACH OF THE FAB METHODS?

The number of days required for a woman to practice abstinence or use another method before the effective use of FAB methods, as shown in the table below, depends on the length of her menstrual cycle.

Table 17. Length of time to practice abstinence and use another method before effective use of FAB methods is achieved	
Method	No. of Days to Abstain or Use Another Method
Standard Days Method	12
Two-Day Method	13
Billings Ovulation Method	18
Symptothermal Method	17

Source: Family Planning: A Global Handbook for Providers WHO 2011

WHAT ARE THE WHO-MEC FOR FAB METHODS?

Table 18. MEC categories for FAB methods	
ACCEPT	The method has no restriction.
CAUTION	The method requires extra or special counseling to ensure correct use.
DELAY	The method should be delayed until a condition is evaluated or corrected.

IS FOLLOW-UP NECESSARY?

Routine return visits are not required. However, the client or the couple can meet with the FP service provider during the first few cycles if they want further assistance.

The FP service provider should assure the client that she is

welcome to return in the following cases:

- She has problems, questions, or wants another method.
- She has any major change in health status.
- She thinks she might be pregnant.
- She is having difficulty identifying her fertile days.
- She is having trouble avoiding sex or using another method on the fertile days.



Follow-up visits should also be encouraged to check whether the couple is using the method correctly and to review the observations or records of fertility signs.

WHAT IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT FAB METHODS SHOULD BE PROVIDED TO CLIENTS?

- To be effective, the use of FAB methods requires partners' cooperation. The couple must be committed to abstain or use another method of contraception on fertile days.
- The woman must be aware of body changes or keep track of the days according to the rules of the method being used.
- This method has no side effects or health risks.