**Fertility Awareness Method (FAM)**

**A non-hormonal, non-toxic fertility or contraceptive method**

The fertility awareness method (FAM), also called the sympto-thermal method, is a natural tool to know when you are fertile (1). It is a tool for fertility, as well as a contraceptive method to know when to avoid intercourse or use a barrier (i.e condom) that is all natural and non-toxic. When used correctly, FAM is almost as effective as the pill (99.4% efficacy compared to the pill’s 99.% efficacy rate) (2).

**How does it work?**

A typical menstrual cycle lasts anywhere from 28 – 35 days and ovulation, the release of an egg from the ovaries, usually occurs in the middle of the cycle (i.e. usually day 14 if a 28 day cycle). FAM works on the notion that **you are only fertile for about seven days of your menstrual cycle**, the **five days *leading up to* ovulation** and the **two days *afte*r ovulation**.

The reason for the five days leading up to ovulation is because sperm can survive for up to five days in your fallopian tubes, waiting for your egg to be released. The reason for two days after ovulation is because an egg can stay receptive in your fallopian tube for two days after being released.

If your goal is contraception, abstaining from vaginal intercourse or using a barrier method is recommended during these seven fertile days.

\*It Is important to note that ovulation does not always occur at the same time every month, which is why **you cannot rely on a calendar**. This is why it is important to use the physical signs below to know when you are ovulating\*

**Physical signs of ovulation**

1. **Fertile fluid (i.e. mucous)**
* First physical sign of ovulation i.e. that you are fertile
* Clear, stretchy and slippery
* Occurs 2-3 days before ovulation
* Why do we have mucous? Transports sperm to your egg
* \*caution: mucous can also occur anytime in the cycle when high amounts of estrogen are present, therefore it is possible to see this mucous more than once in the cycle
1. **Ovulation (LH) test strips**
* A urine test with strips you can purchase from the drug store
* Start on day 8 of your cycle (in case you ovulate earlier)
* Why test LH? Luteinizing hormone (LH) is a hormone released from the pituitary gland that signals the ovaries to release an egg (ovulation)
1. **Cervix position**
* In the days before you ovulate, your cervix will be higher and softer
* Your cervix is at the bottom of your uterus, and is normally low (one finger-length inside your vagina) and is surprisingly a hard texture, like the tip of your nose.
1. **Temperature**
* Your resting morning temperature (basal body temperature) should increase by 0.5°C right after ovulation
* Use a basal body temperature thermometer first thing in the morning (under your tongue or inside your vagina) at the same time every morning, before you get up or drink anything
* Start checking your temperature on day 1 of your cycle (first day of menstrual bleeding)
* If you are suffering from an infection, drank alcohol the night before or slept in too long, your temperature may be higher and it should be excluded from the calculations.

Once you have seen fertile fluid, a positive urine LH strip, a consistent rise in temperature for 3 days, then you know you are past ovulation and are therefore not fertile.

**Period and Ovulation Tracking Apps**

* Groove
* Kindara
* P Tracker

**Who should not use FAM?**

* Do not attempt this method if your periods are irregular, as your ovulation and fertile window will probably be at a different time every cycle
* Do not use until after 3 months following stopping hormonal contraception (i.e. the pill, hormonal IUD, etc) as your hormones are adjusting back to their natural cycle and thus ovulation timing may be off during these months.

**IMPORTANT**: the purpose of this article is to be an intro to FAM, please consult more in-depth resources, courses, etc to fully comprehend this method.

**References**

Briden, L. Period Repair Manual. 2015.

Frank-Herrmann et al. The effectiveness of a fertility awareness based method to avoid

pregnancy in relation to a couple’s sexual behaviour during the fertile time: a prospective longitudinal study. Hum Reprod. 2007 May;22(5): 1310-9.