

Diocese of Brentwood Department for Marriage and Family Life

Introduction to Natural Family Planning

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is a natural, healthy and effective method which unites husband and wife in the shared responsibility of creating and caring for their family.

The Catholic Church recognises that couples, in exercising responsible parenthood, may for good reasons decide not to have additional children for either a certain or an indefinite period of time. However the Church also calls on every couple to respect the essential connection between procreation and the intimate union of husband and wife.

NFP refers to various techniques which enable couples to reliably differentiate between fertile and non-fertile days in the monthly cycles, enabling them to live and love in harmony with the teachings of the Church. A number of trials have shown that when used correctly the best methods achieve 99% success in avoiding unintended pregnancies. Unlike artificial methods of contraception, NFP involves short, periodic abstinence for couples who are not seeking to conceive at that particular time. This can be an opportunity to exercise self-discipline within marriage and increase communication between spouses, while also respecting the integrity of the human body as God has created it.

The methods are easy to learn with no harmful side effects, they are embryo-friendly and result in fewer divorces, due to the mutual understanding and joint responsibility that NFP couples practice. With increased use, NFP builds virtue as couples learn to live unselfishly, recognising the dignity of each other and the value of human life and love.

Sometimes the term 'Natural Fertility Awareness' is preferred, reflecting the fact that these techniques are highly effective in helping couples achieve pregnancy as well as diagnosing underlying health problems. Evidence suggests a third of couples who struggle with fertility issues can conceive with the help of one of these methods.

What are the main methods?

The combined lifespan of the male sperm and female ovum means a couple has 6-7 days of fertility each cycle. Each method uses one or more biological signs to identify the fertile days (the earlier calendar-based approach is rather less accurate in identifying potentially-fertile days). Different methods will suit different couples. Couples should work with an instructor to learn the method properly in order to achieve good levels of success, however some models are designed to be taught remotely with an element of home study.

Billings Ovulation Method - is the original method of fertility awareness established by Drs John and Evelyn Billings, in which women are taught to recognise the changing feel of cervical mucus at fertile and non-fertile times.

Creighton Model FertilityCare System - this method relies on the standardised observation and charting of cervical mucus and other biological signs to help couples achieve or avoid pregnancy. Instructors in this method tend to have a major focus on the use of charting to diagnose issues with fertility and other health problems.

Sympto-Thermal Method - this method, taught by the NFP Teachers Association and the Couple-to-Couple League, combines mucus observations with a daily temperature measurement to provide a cross-check.

Marquette Method - this method tracks hormone levels (oestrogen and lutenising hormone) directly using a urine test on certain days during the cycle. It is similar in principal to the *Persona* device but provides greater transparency and fertility awareness by using a charting approach similar to other methods, as well as a much higher success rate. Hormone data can be combined with mucus observations, and there is also a simple mucus only version. Although there are no teachers based in the UK, the method is designed for online learning supported by a discussion forum and access to online consultations.

Isn't this just Catholic contraception?

No. The phrase 'Contraceptive mentality' was used on a number of occasions by Pope St John Paul II to illustrate how the widespread acceptance and use of artificial contraception distorted society's view of the human person, the dignity of life and the sanctity of marriage. The use of NFP represents a fundamentality different mindset, based on a desire to cooperate with the Creator of all life.

Isn't it more Catholic just to leave it all to God?

God has given us the capacity to act freely as well as the responsibility to take care of all that he has given us. Within the order of creation we see that sexual union is ordered to procreation, but also that fertility follows a cyclical pattern and changes over an individual's life time. A couple who prayerfully discern that they have strong enough reasons for avoiding pregnancy to justify the sacrifice of periodic abstinence are no less Catholic, in the eyes of the Church, than a couple who decide either to actively seek more children or take a more relaxed approach.

Why does the Church single out contraception - aren't other medicines just as unnatural?

One of the attractions of NFP even to non-Catholics is that it is 'natural' in the sense that it doesn't involve long-term use of hormones with potentially harmful or undesirable side effects. However Catholic teaching is concerned with what is 'natural' in a different sense: what our reason can discern from the natural ordering of things in creation, in this case the intrinsic connection between sexual union and procreation. Medicine is about restoring health and wholeness; contraception on the other hand prevents our bodies from fulfilling a natural, healthy function.

Where can I find an instructor?

The following NFP instructors local to the Diocese of Brentwood have agreed to their details being listed here.

Dawn Young (Billings Ovulation Method)
Operating from Childcare House, Rayleigh, Essex
Email: dawn.young205@gmail.com
Mobile:07552989610

Freda McMahon (Creighton Model Fertility Care)
Operating from St Patrick's, Soho Square (Westminster)
Email: freda@naturalfertilitymatters.com
Mobile: 07887 676 923

Carmel Lo (Sympto-Thermal Method - NFPTA)
Based in Basildon, working within the NHS
Email: cml01952@gmail.com

Various organisations provide training in the different methods and maintain lists of accredited instructors which you can access via the official websites:

Billings Method England: www.billingsmethodengland.org.uk
Creighton Model Fertility Care System: www.creightonmodel.com
Couple-to-Couple League GB (sympto-thermal method): www.cclgb.org.uk
CCL International (resources and online support for home study): www.ccli.org
Natural Family Planning Teachers Association (sympto-thermal method): www.nfpta.org.uk
Marquette Method (resources and online support for home study): nfp.marquette.edu

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