

Introduction

UPDATE FOR THE FOURTH EDITION

What amazing changes are occurring in the field of human nutrition! Daily we learn about new links between nutrition and health, whether it is the role of vitamin D in reducing inflammation or preventing cancer, the effect of the omega-3 fatty acids on brain function, or the antioxidant properties of the hundreds of newly-discovered nutrients in brightly-colored plant foods. When it comes to “fertility, cycles, and nutrition,” there has been an equal explosion of interest and new research. In response, the 4th edition of this book has been completely rewritten from beginning to end. While many of the chapter subjects and sequences are the same, virtually every topic has been expanded as well as updated, and some new ones have been added.

It has been most heartening to see that without exception, the new research confirms, extends, and strengthens older studies that formed the basis of the first three editions of *Fertility, Cycles & Nutrition*. This means that the new is consistent with the old, but now there are many more options as you attempt to overcome specific reproductive problems. For example, new research on the effect of light on the hormone melatonin, and on melatonin’s effect on reproductive hormones (including progesterone), is truly “shedding light” on a fascinating, useful, but poorly understood topic. New specifics of how excess exercise affects the menstrual cycle is another example of valuable new research confirming and extending the old.

Through the validation that such research provides, what in the recent past was perhaps somewhat “alternative” is rapidly becoming mainstream. For example, the suggestion to use flax oil for various reproductive problems, first suggested in the *Fertility, Cycles & Nutrition* update of 1996, is now a common recommendation. Meanwhile, flax oil’s “first cousin” — fish oil — is being investigated vigorously for its effect on pregnancy, prenatal development, postpartum health, and postnatal brain function.

You will notice that the new *Fertility, Cycles & Nutrition* has more physiological explanations than the slimmer volumes of the past. I have included basic explanations of a number of normal and abnormal processes, so that you can see the rationale for the solution to the various problems that we are attempting to solve. One example of this is the explanation of the critical cell division of the ovum (meiosis), which, amazingly, occurs only a few hours before

ovulation. This discussion enables the reader to gain a far clearer understanding of age-related infertility, early miscarriage, and even Down syndrome.

The new *Fertility, Cycles & Nutrition*, like the old one, has an inherently Catholic outlook, since the publisher, The Couple to Couple League, is a Catholic organization that teaches Natural Family Planning. But whether or not you are Catholic or Christian, you will still find it a gentle, encouraging, and practical book, whether you are using it to overcome irregular cycles or to increase your chances of having a baby.

Among the nicest and most common compliments I receive about *Fertility, Cycles & Nutrition* are comments like these: “I loaned it to my friend. She never gave it back!” Or, “I’ve had to buy three or four copies because I keep giving it to my sisters and my friends!” When women lend their books to their sisters and friends, it is because they believe that the book will make a positive difference in their lives. With all my heart, I hope that this edition of *Fertility, Cycles & Nutrition* will make an even bigger difference in your life and health, and in that of your friends and family. I am excited and optimistic that it will do so.

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ORIGINAL INTRODUCTION

Couples who are already practicing a healthy lifestyle, including emphasis on holistic nutrition, are often drawn to the practice of natural family planning (NFP). Conversely, those who choose NFP primarily for other reasons often seem to broaden their interests to include more natural approaches to other areas of life and health. For example, interest in alternative childbirth options is high among NFP users, and the rate of breastfeeding is simply phenomenal. Success in the practice of natural birth regulation, without recourse to chemicals, devices or surgery, undoubtedly encourages such couples to work in harmony with nature in other areas such as nutrition.

There are some striking similarities between natural family planning for birth control and holistic nutrition for health or healing. Both may be termed “appropriate technology” in that they rely on the intelligent use of ordinary things (food, vitamins, information) that may be obtained without undue effort or expense. As such, they are all too often overlooked in an environment in which the high technologies of synthetic pharmaceutical agents or surgery are frequently the first choices for birth control or health care. For their success, both NFP and nutrition require a certain amount of personal commitment, bodily self-awareness and discipline of the appetites, either sexual or for food. Yet both offer large rewards for these small sacrifices — and a major one is improved physical health over the long term.

Despite the close kinship between NFP and nutrition, a real gap has existed in relating the two for practical applications. While natural family planning may be practiced successfully despite a wide range of reproductive disorders,

experience shows that couples are happier with it when the times of abstinence are not prolonged by various cycle irregularities and when the use of the infertile time is not disrupted by premenstrual syndrome (PMS), prolonged menses, vaginal infections, or the like. For couples using NFP to overcome infertility, excellent nutrition is as essential as the charting of fertility signs and the timing of intercourse.

This book closes the “information gap” between natural family planning and nutrition for reproductive health. The first part, “Good Nutrition for Good Health,” reflects my belief that good nutrition is the best health protector, whether we are referring to reproductive health, cardiovascular health, or any other aspect of health. A diet based on a wide variety of whole foods seems simply to be the diet on which human beings thrive with the least problems for the longest time.

The second part tackles specific reproductive problems, starting with PMS. Since PMS shares a common cause with several other disorders, it is recommended reading even for those who are free from it.

The “Further Reading” and “Resources” pages again emphasize the role of individual responsibility; there is no substitute for your own informed awareness of the often controversial new ideas that are currently transforming the world of nutrition.